COLLECTION

OF

BRITISH AUTHORS

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

VOL. 1746.

SEAFORTH BY FLORENCE MONTGOMERY.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

SEAFORTH

BY

FLORENCE MONTGOMERY,

AUTHOR OF "MISUNDERSTOOD," "THROWN TOGETHER," ETC.

COPYRIGHT EDITION.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1878.

The Right of Translation is reserved.

CONTENTS

OF VOLUME II.

BOOK IV.

(Continued.)

			Page
CHAPTER	XI.	The Clashing of Interests	9
—	XII.	A Riddle and its Answer	16
—	XIII.	The Vulnerable Part	24
—	XIV.	The Speech in the Banqueting-hall	32
—	XV.	What followed in the Picture-Gallery	39

BOOK V.

CHAPTER	I.	Godfrey at College	49
—	II.	The Gathering of the Cloud	54
—	III.	The Cloud Bursts	63
—	IV.	At Length we meet again, Love	69
—	V.	Husband and Wife	75
—	VI.	"Not Wanted"	84

BOOK VI.

CHAPTER	I.	The Enchanted Orange-grove	89
—	II.	Lord Seaforth and his Daughter	103
—	III.	Joan's First Visit from Home	108
—	IV.	The Assizes	123

Page

CHAPTER V. The Daisies' Mistake 128
— VI. Divided 140
— VII. Mr. Waukenphast 150
— VIII. The Conversation in the Smoking-room . . 160
— IX. Mutual Recognitions 170
— X. What does it all mean? 176
— XI. In the Gardens of Monaco 184
— XII. The End of it all 189
— XIII. Husband and Wife 195
— XIV. Godfrey's Confession 202

BOOK VII.

CHAPTER I. Godfrey's Twenty-fifth Birthday 211
— II. The Irony of Fate 220

BOOK VIII.

CHAPTER I. Lincoln's Inn Fields 225
— II. Godfrey's History 230
— III. Explanations 241
— IV. The Figures by Lord Seaforth's Bedside . . 246
— V. The Meeting of the Lovers in the old Picture-Gallery 252
— VI. Godfrey's Twenty-sixth Birthday 256

BOOK IX.

CHAPTER I. A Peep into the Future 265

BOOK IV.

(CONTINUED.)

CHAPTER XI.

The Clashing of Interests.

LADY SEAFORTH started to her feet and threw up her hands in dismay. She was speechless, but the boys were loud in their exclamations of horror and astonishment. "Well!" exclaimed Colin. "I never knew anything so shabby in my life! I would not have believed it of Godfrey Seaforth! I can hardly believe it now!"

"Sneak!" cried Andrew, "eavesdropper!"

"Can he have been there the whole time!" exclaimed Lady Seaforth when she at last found her voice. "What *is* to be done?"

"He must have been," said Andrew. "He did not come in since I have been here, that I'll declare. He must have heard every word we said."

Lady Seaforth began walking up and down the room in an agitated manner, going over in her own

mind every word of the recent conversation. "Will he repeat it? Will he repeat it?" was the question that kept forcing itself upon her. Judging him from her own standard, measuring his feelings towards her by her feelings towards him, imputing to him the motives by which, in such a case, she would herself have been actuated, she most undoubtedly would! And, in great alarm, she quickly left the room and took her way to her husband's private apartments.

The door of the library was partly open. Voices were heard from within, and she stood still and listened.

"And you really would like to go into Parliament?" were the words which fell upon her ear. "I am willing, indeed, I am anxious, that you should. I was not in the House of Commons myself, nor were my father and grandfather. But then our tastes did not lie that way. With you the case is different. Have you ever tried your hand at speaking? I suppose not."

"Only by myself," came in quiet tones, the voice she hated so bitterly. "I have sometimes, when

alone on the hills at home, made imaginary speeches on different subjects."

"You shall try at a tenants' dinner some day. There will be one before you go. Let me see, how old are you?"

"I shall be eighteen on January the 26th."

"Well, then, you will be twenty-two just at the time of the next general election, and that would be the time too when you are leaving Oxford. So it all fits in admirably. You are, of course, the proper person to represent the county, and——"

But Lady Seaforth waited to hear no more. She rushed back to her sons in a tumult of indignation.

"He has been listening the whole time," she exclaimed, "he has heard every word we said, and then rushed off to his uncle to foil all our plans."

She then repeated what she heard, adding comments of her own.

The boys were at first dumb with dismay and astonishment.

"Never mind, mother," said Colin at last, soothingly, "there are plenty of other seats to be had. And to tell you the truth I would far rather repre-

sent my own county, or some Scotch borough. It is much more natural I should."

"Your own county! a Scotch borough!" she exclaimed bitterly. "You talk as if you had a large fortune at your command. Who is to pay for your election? When will you understand that you and Andrew are paupers, absolute paupers?"

"Well! I declare, mother," exclaimed Colin rather warmly, "this is the first time you have ever enlightened us! I always thought——"

"Thought what?" she said with increasing bitterness, "that Lord Seaforth was going to leave you each a large fortune, I suppose?"

"Well! don't let us quarrel over it, mother," said Colin, lightly.

His own temper was quite imperturbable, and he always changed the subject when his mother lost hers.

"And so you actually spotted the eavesdropper in the room?" he went on. "How *did* he look when he saw you?"

"He didn't see me. No one saw me," said Lady Seaforth, without perceiving the admission she was

making. "I didn't go in when I found he was there."

"Then how do you know what he said?" inquired Colin, innocently.

"I listened at the ——," began Lady Seaforth, but suddenly stopped herself, "I mean the door was a little open, and I couldn't help hearing what was being said."

"I am sorry for that," said Colin, quietly.

"Why?" she said sharply.

"Because," he answered gravely, "we can't make out a case against him for listening if we came by our proofs the same way."

The implied reproof stung Lady Seaforth.

She answered at random. "We shan't want proofs as you call it. The proofs of his meanness will be that, when I ask Lord Seaforth for the seat and the living, he will tell me he has promised both."

"But why the living?" broke from Andrew.

"I don't know," she answered desperately. "I feel as if it would slip from us too. Everything is against us. Our luck is quite gone."

Colin here slipped away, annoyed at the turn the conversation was taking, but Andrew came nearer, and sat down by his mother on the sofa.

"If you can convince Lord Seaforth," he said, "that his nephew is a sneak, which he *is*, which he must be, he will not perhaps be so ready to do what he asks him."

Lady Seaforth looked at her son, and felt how little he understood the matter, and how impossible it was to explain it to him.

"I hate him, Andrew," she cried, her self-control leaving her entirely.

"I know you do, mother," he answered; "and, as far as I can see, he deserves it."

Now this, though Andrew did not know it, was the very balm his mother needed. It was, as we know, one of her sorest grievances that she could never catch Godfrey tripping, nor drag him down.

But now she really had a handle against him, and if she only used it properly she might succeed in lowering him in her husband's eyes. At any rate, he was in her power.

This thought restored to her her equanimity, and raised her drooping spirits once more.

"It's an ill wind that blows no one any good," she said to herself, as she rose from the sofa, and, followed by Andrew, went into her own boudoir to tea.

CHAPTER XII.

A Riddle and its Answer,

THIS was only the beginning; for when Lady Seaforth formally announced to her husband that she was sending her younger son to the university, with a view to Holy Orders, and asked him to put his name down for the next presentation to the living, he informed her that he had, that very day, by his nephew's desire, promised it to the tutor now resident in the house.

From that day she lost no opportunity of trying to make Godfrey feel that he was in her power. There was not an inuendo, not an allusion of any kind, that she did not turn to account at dinner before everyone. She would make meaning remarks, and then try to abash him by looking fixedly at him.

But, strange to say, Godfrey neither blushed, nor avoided her eye, nor did any of those things a guilty person is supposed to do.

"Hardened effrontery," Lady Seaforth called it; but her eldest son had a different opinion.

It was a most disagreeable atmosphere to live in, and Colin wanted his mother to put an end to it by taxing Godfrey with his conduct to his face, and giving him a chance of speaking in his own defence.

But this Lady Seaforth would not do at present. She enjoyed too much the feeling that she had at last caught her enemy in a trap, and she wanted to harass him as long as possible before dealing him his death-blow.

What this death-blow was to be she had not as yet made up her mind.

There was a certain awkwardness in making her husband acquainted with the facts of the case and the details of the conversation. She did not know how much Godfrey might have repeated and how much he might have left unsaid; and she did not wish Lord Seaforth to know more about it than could possibly be helped.

She wanted very much to lower Godfrey in his uncle's eyes, but then it was difficult to do it with-

out revealing much concerning herself and her sons which she would rather keep concealed.

For her pride with respect to her boys had risen very much since she had found how hopeless it was to expect any help for them in their future from Lord Seaforth.

In the course of her interview with her husband she had gathered very clearly that even had the things she wanted for her sons not been already appropriated he would not have given them to Colin and Andrew.

She saw more clearly than ever his consistent determination to have nothing personally to do with them, and to ignore altogether his connection with them.

So she was determined he should not see how very much she had counted upon him in her plans for their provision in life.

He should not, at any rate, have a chance of exulting over her discomfiture. All this necessitated a very careful consideration of her dealings with Godfrey, and she determined to do nothing in a hurry.

Her feelings of disgust may therefore be very easily imagined when one day, as she was sitting in her boudoir, revolving the crisis in her mind, and wondering how her husband could with safety be brought into it, Colin suddenly burst in, exclaiming, "Acquitted! acquitted! Honourably acquitted!"

"What do you mean?" she said hastily, "and who are you talking about?"

"Who?" he repeated, "why Godfrey Seaforth, of course. Mother! after all, he never heard a single word we said!"

"Nonsense!" she said quickly. "How do you know? how *can* you know?"

"From the best possible authority," he answered. "He has just told me so himself. I have been having a long conversation with him. I ——"

"I don't believe a word of his story," she interrupted.

"But you haven't heard it yet!" exclaimed Colin.

"Well! what is it?" she said unwillingly; "be

quick and tell it. Don't keep me on tenter-hooks like this."

Colin went on to say that Godfrey not only utterly denied having heard a word of the conversation, but that he could hardly get him to believe that anyone had been in the room at all. He seemed quite puzzled at the idea, having imagined the room to be perfectly empty. It had been empty, he declared, when he came in and when he went out; and there had not been a sound in the room during the whole time he had been there.

Lady Seaforth interrupted the narrative several times with such exclamations as, "Nonsense! And you believe this!" &c.; but Colin went quietly on. He seemed determined to tell the story his own way. He was evidently working up to some point, which he kept in the background, for there was a twinkle in his eye the whole time, more particularly when his mother broke in with her impatient exclamations. "The proof," he said, "is that he cannot tell me one word we said."

"Really, Colin," she said at last, "you are very simple for your age. How can you submit to have

dust thrown in your eyes in this way! How can you believe such nonsense, or call such a cock-and-bull story a proof!"

"I am expounding a riddle, mother, dear," answered Colin. "You are a clever woman, and must guess the answer. The answer to a riddle, you know, always seems impossible till you know it. Now here it is:

"He *was* in the room, *we* were in the room. We talked, and yet he never heard a word of our conversation! *Je vous le donne en cinq, je vous le donne en dix.* Do you give it up? Well, then, here is the answer. *He was asleep the whole time!* There now, mother, what do you think of that?"

"I don't believe a word of it," she said, walking up and down the room with ill-concealed fury. "I wish you hadn't interfered. Why were you so officious?"

"Mother," he said gravely, "this condemning a man unheard was more than I could stand. It went against me; I couldn't bear it any longer. The evidence of his having listened was too strong for me to dispute it, but I did always doubt his having

made use of his information. I felt sure it was a mere coincidence. I couldn't believe Godfrey Seaforth capable of such meanness. You have only to look at his face."

"You are like a romantic school-girl!" she exclaimed contemptuously. "What is there in his face to make such a fuss about? I don't believe in him one bit, and I tell you he has trumped up this story for fear of getting into trouble with his uncle."

"Mother, dear!" said Colin reproachfully. He was horrified to see how his mother's hatred of Godfrey was triumphing over truth, justice, and every other noble feeling. He could hardly believe his ears.

But Lady Seaforth had quite passed the bounds of reason now.

"Who is to say whether he was asleep or not?" she exclaimed. "We have only his own word to go upon, and that is not worth much. If you could say you saw him asleep yourself, I would believe his story; but you can't. No; nor anyone else. There is no one to corroborate his assertion; no

witness to the truth of his tale. And I tell you I don't believe it, and I won't!"

Colin looked disconcerted for a moment, and then a sudden thought seemed to strike him.

"Stop a minute, mother," he said eagerly; "you say you will believe his assertion of being asleep if I can find a witness?"

"Certainly," she answered, a smile of triumph coming into her face. "I will believe it then, but not till then."

"Very well," said Colin, "I also will consent to abide by the testimony of a witness. Mind, mother, I hold you to your word. Now I want your leave to summon a witness at once, and your promise that my witness, whoever it may be, shall be allowed instantly to appear in this very room."

"Certainly," said Lady Seaforth again. "I grant both requests. So summon your witness, oh learned judge, and arbitrator in other people's matters!"

"Then," said Colin, whose spirit was now thoroughly roused, "then, in the name of truth and justice, I summon my sister Joan!"

CHAPTER XIII.

The Vulnerable Part.

THE entrance of Andrew here interrupted the conversation, and gave Lady Seaforth time to recover from the astonishment into which her son's unexpected words had thrown her. By her desire, Colin made his brother acquainted with the facts of the case; and when he had finished, she turned to him, and said, "And now, Colin, explain yourself. What do you mean? Why do you bring the child's name into this affair? What on earth can she have to do with it?"

"This," answered Colin; "you may not have observed it, as you were speaking at the time, but that afternoon, she came into the west drawing-room for a moment, looked straight at the window where Godfrey Seaforth was sitting, and then ran away. Now, both you and I, mother, will consent to abide by the testimony of a little child."

He laid his hand on the bell as he spoke.

Lady Seaforth's face assumed a most disagreeable expression.

She almost put out her hand as if to prevent her son carrying out his intention, but she checked herself, and sat down upon the sofa, pale and agitated.

She shrank from the thought of the coming interview. She would have given anything to cancel her promise, and to forbid the appearing of her neglected and unloved child. But she did not dare.

Her son's sudden assumption of authority and determination surprised and overawed her; and, besides, if she withdrew from her word it would look as if she were afraid of being defeated.

When the servant appeared she had partially recovered, and herself sent the message up to the schoolroom.

The trembling form of little Joan presently appeared in the door-way.

Colin was advancing towards her, but Lady Seaforth imperiously called him back.

"Leave it to me," she said.

"Come right in," she continued to the child. "Answer the questions I am going to ask you, and then you can go upstairs again."

"Do you remember, about a fortnight ago, coming into the west drawing-room, at about half-past four in the afternoon, when it was getting dusk?"

Little Joan thought for a moment, and then answered in the affirmative.

"Who did you see in the room?"

The child thought again, and then, indicating her half-brothers, she said,

"They were there, and you, mamma."

"Anybody else?"

"No, nobody else."

A faint smile of triumph overspread Lady Seaforth's face, and Colin breathed quickly.

"You are sure," resumed Lady Seaforth, "that there was no one else in any part of the room?"

"No —— oh! except Godfrey. He was in the window seat."

"Oh! he was in the window seat! You are quite sure of that?"

"Yes! quite sure."

"What was he doing?"

"Nothing. He was sitting there; or at least——"

"At least what?"

"I mean he was half sitting, half leaning, with his head——"

"With his head bent forward," interrupted Lady Seaforth eagerly, "as if he was listening to something?"

"No," answered Joan, "with his head against the window. He was fast asleep."

"That will do," said Lady Seaforth, "you may go."

Colin went away also.

He had no wish to exult over his mother's defeat.

Justice was done, and with that he was satisfied.

Lady Seaforth gave way to a burst of agitation directly the door was closed.

"He foils me everywhere," she cried, as she threw herself down upon the sofa. "He thwarts me every way, baulks me of my revenge, and lowers me in the eyes of everyone. What am I to do!"

In her despair, she felt Godfrey to be like the man in the ancient fable, who, dipped by his mother in the river, was rendered invulnerable in every part.

Worse! That man at least was vulnerable in the heel by which his mother held him; but this boy! he had no weak point, no vulnerable part; she could neither wound his feelings nor catch him tripping.

Unscathed he had come out of the trial, his honour unsullied, his name unblackened still.

"If only that child had not come into the room at that particular moment," she went on passionately, "all might still have been well. Why, oh! why should such a thing have happened! Why, except that she should be my bane, as she has been from the moment of her birth. What spirit of evil omen could have brought her there just then?"

She was moaning all this to herself, but Andrew caught the last words, and, anxious to soothe his mother, and in the hope of distracting her a little, he answered—

"She came to look for Godfrey Seaforth, I dare-say. They are great friends."

"*What!*" she cried, turning upon him so sharply that he was quite startled.

Andrew repeated what he had said, and took the opportunity of saying he thought it was rather hard that he and Colin should never have been allowed to see anything of their little sister, nor to have any communication with her; and that this comparative stranger should make her his companion, and be so much with her.

"But who allows it!" exclaimed Lady Seaforth. "What do you mean?"

"I'm sure I don't know," answered Andrew, "but they are a great deal together upstairs."

"Upstairs!" said his mother, "in the schoolroom! What can the governess be thinking of!"

"No!" answered Andrew, "I don't mean in the schoolroom, but I have seen them once or twice sitting in the picture-gallery since I have been home these holidays. She seems quite at home with *him*, but Colin and I never can get her to speak, even

when we do see her. She seems too shy and frightened to answer."

Lady Seaforth paid no attention to what her son was saying. She made some hasty excuse and left the room.

She went straight up to the picture-gallery, pushed open the heavy oak door, and looked in.

By the light of the silver lamp Godfrey and little Joan were to be seen in deep and earnest conversation.

The child, with her hair thrown back from her flushed face, was looking up at him, evidently giving him an account of the recent interview.

He was listening with deep interest, and when the tale was finished, he bent down, and took her hands in his, saying, "Thank you, little Joan. You have, all unknowing, cleared me from a most unpleasant suspicion."

. . . . . .

On the dark face watching, was painted many and various expressions, and she moved away stealthily, muttering to herself, "At last! at last!"

Down the passage to her own apartment she

went, still muttering the same words over and over again.

Yes! at last! At last she has discovered his vulnerable part! At last she has found the weak spot in his armour! And at last she can take her revenge!

She has at last a weapon in her own hands, which she can wield as she pleases, and with which she has full power.

"But not to-night," she said to herself wearily, as she gained the door of her own bed-room. "I am too worn and weary with the strain and excitement of the day. Wait till to-morrow!"

CHAPTER XIV.

The Speech in the Banqueting-hall.

WHAT will to-morrow be?

Who can tell?

The "to-morrow," for which Lady Seaforth waited to execute her scheme of revenge, was Godfrey's birthday.

The day dawned brightly, and she was roused at an early hour by the ringing of the joy-bells, and the boom of the guns, which had never been fired since the day she had arrived at Seaforth a bride.

She soon discovered that the day was not to pass unobserved.

A tenant's dinner was to take place in the banqueting-hall, in honour of the occasion, and Lord Seaforth and his nephew were to be present at it.

Godfrey all day had a sense, whenever he was

in his aunt's presence, of there being thunder in the air.

There was something in her manner that made him feel a storm was impending; but his mind was taken up with many matters, and more especially with thinking over the speech he was to make to the farmers; so he did not trouble himself much about her.

The dinner was to take place at four o'clock, and his speech was to follow his uncle's at the close of the repast.

In the passage which overlooked from a height the great hall where the tenants' dinner was to take place, there was a wide slit in the thick wall, which formed a kind of peep-hole, from which all that was going on below could be seen and heard.

Originally designed for purposes of safety in troublous times, it had in more modern days been used for overlooking balls or banquets; and the guests would often be conveyed up there to look down upon the gay and festive scene below, which made such a pretty *coup d'œil.* At this niche it was settled by Joan and Godfrey that she was to establish

herself at the hour when the speeches were to begin, and here she would see without being seen and hear all that was said below.

She was to put her little white handkerchief up for a minute as a signal, so that he should know when she had arrived.

Matters being thus arranged between them, he came to wish her good-bye before descending to the dinner, and told her he would come straight to the picture-gallery from the banqueting-hall to meet her directly the speeches were over and he could get away.

"You will see from the niche," he said, as he left her, "when I leave the hall, and then we shall arrive at the picture-gallery at the same time."

At four o'clock precisely Godfrey and his uncle entered the hall and took their seats at the head of the table.

The dinner was long, and would have been tedious had Godfrey not been interested by the novelty of the proceedings.

It was over at last; and the tables cleared.

Lord Seaforth then rose and said a few words, which were warmly received; and then Godfrey's

turn came. He rose directly, but ere he opened his lips, he cast one upward glance at the niche far above him. Yes. The little white handkerchief was visible; the signal was there. Little Joan had arrived.

Secure of at least one sympathetic listener Godfrey felt more confidence, and he began.

All present turned towards him with interest, and the deepest silence reigned in the hall, as his clear quiet voice made itself heard.

The beauty of his intonation, the force of the words he chose, the fervid language in which he clothed the thoughts of his mind, fascinated his audience at once, and, as he warmed with his subject, completely carried them away. Everyone, his uncle included, was taken by surprise, and all listened eagerly.

He spoke with that utter freedom from self-consciousness which is such a charm.

His earnest manner, its intensity and its quiet, the entire absence of any tricks of delivery, or of any affectation in his choice and arrangement of words, all added to the effect of his speech.

The speech itself, too, was of that kind which,

so to speak, seems only to scratch the surface of the speaker's knowledge.

He seemed to have so much beneath it, to hold so much in check; never in any degree to exhaust his subject. The impression he left on the minds of his hearers was more how much he *could* say than how much he was saying.

His was the eloquence that comes from the heart's fire acting on a cultured mind, and coloured by deep feeling, and a brilliant imagination.

There was in it the living germ of oratory, and it brought him to a close which, all unrealised by himself, was a peroration of a very rare kind.

He sat down when he had finished as quietly as if he had been speaking to himself; as if, having said what he had to say, he considered that that was all that was expected of him; and not as if he thought he had done anything out of the common way.

And when cheer upon cheer rose, and hands were eagerly held out in congratulation, a flush of surprise mounted to his brow, succeeded by an emotion of shyness at finding himself suddenly the object of so much attention and adulation.

For one and all were delighted, and "Bravo! Mr. Seaforth!" "Three cheers for Mr. Seaforth!" rang from lip to lip.

His dark eyes glowed as he turned from one to the other, as he met the grasp of his uncle's hand, and saw that stern face working with emotion.

He was astonished at the effect his words had produced, at the general demonstration they had called forth.

It seemed to him he had gained the applause too easily; as if what he had done was unworthy of so much; for he knew in himself that this was nothing as compared to what he felt he might do; as compared with the standard at which he aimed.

It seemed hardly right that words which came to him so easily as the expression of his thoughts and opinions should be made so much of.

As soon as he could escape, he left the crowded hall, and went up to the picture-gallery to keep his appointment with little Joan.

She was already there when he entered, and came running to meet him with glowing eyes, and cheeks flushed with excitement.

"Oh, Godfrey! it was so beautiful! and it made me feel so proud and happy!"

"And did you hear it well?" he said, smiling down upon her.

"Every word," she answered; "and how they did all cheer!"

"But you must have left," said Godfrey, "before it was all over. Why did you do that?"

"Ah, yes!" said the child. "I was so disappointed, for I wanted to see the excitement, and I liked feeling all the cheering was for your sake; but just as it was getting so loud, and all the hand-shaking beginning, who should come to the niche but mamma!"

"Lady Seaforth!" exclaimed Godfrey in surprise.

"Yes," said Joan, "so of course I came away directly. But now tell me, Godfrey," she went on, throwing back her hair, and gazing eagerly up into his face, "tell me all about it."

Just at this moment hasty footsteps were heard approaching, one of the doors was thrown rather violently open, and Lady Seaforth and her sons entered the picture-gallery.

CHAPTER XV.

What followed in the Picture-Gallery.

LADY SEAFORTH'S face was flushed and angry, and she looked like one possessed of an evil spirit.

In truth she was. For she had been a witness of all little Joan had been so sorry to miss, of all that would have made her "so proud and happy;" and I leave the reader to imagine what kind of spirit the sight had roused within her.

Yes; she had seen the eager hands held out to congratulate her triumphant adversary; she had heard the shouts which had made the rafters ring with his hated name. She had seen him in the very position she had always hoped for for Colin; and, above all, she had seen her husband's eyes glowing with love and pride, his face working with tenderest emotion.

Both as a mother and as a wife her feelings had been outraged.

They had been those of Haman when he heard the shouts accorded to Mordecai: "Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour!"

Little Joan shrank back on her mother's entrance, and kept close to Godfrey, as if for protection.

"I told you so, Colin," said Lady Seaforth, turning with a sort of impatient triumph to her eldest son, whose pleasant face was clouded, and who looked as if he wished himself hundreds of miles away. "I told you so, and you would not believe me. Joan," she continued, suddenly turning upon the child, "what are you doing here? What is the meaning of your being in the picture-gallery? Go back to the schoolroom directly."

Joan obeyed at once, and walked quietly away.

She merely looked upon the accident of her mother's arrival as a disagreeable interruption, and fully intended returning later for her interview with Godfrey.

But Godfrey, who, as we know, had all day long had an uneasy feeling with regard to Lady Seaforth,

felt that there was more in all this than met the eye. Something in her whole air and manner told him that this was no accidental interruption, but that the whole scene had been premeditated and predetermined.

He felt that if he did not speak at once, the fast disappearing little figure in the distance would be the last he should see of little Joan.

"I am leaving Seaforth in a few days for many months," he said; "may I not go after my little cousin and wish her good-bye?"

Here Colin looked up, and seemed about to speak, but changed his mind, and suddenly left the picture-gallery.

"You can say good-bye now," said Lady Seaforth, coldly. "Joan!"

The child heard the call, and came back.

"Your cousin wishes to take leave of you. He is going away very soon, and you will not see him again before he goes; for I forbid your coming into the picture-gallery any more."

She stood utterly unmoved by the look of despair that came into little Joan's face, by the

quick involuntary clasping of her two little hands together.

The child looked round with her great dark eyes like a hunted stag which is trying to escape from its tormentors, and sees no way open.

First at her mother, standing stern and relentless; then at Andrew, whose head was turned away; till she rested them on Godfrey, who was waiting to meet them.

And then their expression changed.

Whether Godfrey had at first had any intention of resisting the decree may be doubted, but at any rate a look he had intercepted of Lady Seaforth's directed at her daughter had caused him to change his mind.

For it was a look he knew well, and he knew too the feelings it denoted. It was the self-same look his father had been wont to cast at him.

Alarmed for Joan's sake, he settled in his own mind that resistance would be a fatal course to pursue, and that her greatest safety lay in complete submission.

The child would only otherwise suffer hereafter, and he would no longer be at hand to help.

So, when Joan's imploring eyes sought his, he was ready.

She read in them what he would have her do.

Long and earnestly she gazed, as if learning her lesson, as if gathering every moment strength, and calm, and counsel, from their rapt and speaking expression.

And, acting under their guidance, yielding herself to their power, she came nearer, and held out both her little hands.

"Good-bye, Godfrey," she whispered.

He bent over her gravely, almost solemnly, holding her trembling hands in his. "God bless you, little Joan!"

They stood thus for a moment, he looking down tenderly upon her, she with her eyes still fixed upon his face.

"You can go now," said Lady Seaforth.

Joan's hands dropped listlessly at her side, and she turned away; while Godfrey stood motionless, watching her.

There—where they had met—they parted; with "Godfrey, Earl of Seaforth," looking down upon them, and the groups of smiling children around.

Slowly she began to recede down the long long gallery towards the door at the further end.

She had the noble spirit of a martyr, this young child; for though her heart was bleeding within her, she would not let him see what it cost her to part like this. She turned round as she went, and tried to reassure him by a faint smile.

God help her! that smile was sadder than any burst of tears could have been.

He stands erect and silent, watching the little figure disappear, marking with yearning love and pity the light childish step that tries so *hard* not to falter, the queenly little head which strives to hold itself so firm.

He sees the sweet little face turn and turn again to take another look at him, till the door at the further end is reached; and then he begins to move too, and walks with a firm step back to the door by which he entered.

He pauses on the threshold for a moment, and

strains his gaze to the far distance. She is standing still now, waiting, with her arms wreathed about the oaken door, which she holds partly open.

Brave she stands, and smiling; all the courage of a noble and unselfish spirit coming to her aid in this the supreme moment of her young existence.

Is she not bearing up for his sake, and acting at his unspoken command?

Bright and firm, as long as she can see him; ready to sacrifice herself as long as her eyes can still discern the form she loves so dearly, her only thought to spare him pain who has glorified her lonely existence, and showered upon her the love and the sympathy of which she stood so sorely in need. Bright and firm! Brave and smiling! . . .

But, as the old oak door closed upon him, the light went out in the life of little Joan!

BOOK V.

BOOK A

CHAPTER I.

Godfrey at College.

GODFREY remained with his tutor till October, and then matriculated at Cambridge.

Many who are reading this will remember, and those who have had no opportunity of knowing can imagine what that hour must be to a young man when, leaving home and school behind him, he comes to the university. I have heard the sensations of the first few days described, by a man verging on forty, as some of the happiest of his existence; like nothing that goes before, nor that comes after.

Now at last the boy is a man. Now at last, drawing up his own arm-chair to his own fireside, he feels himself a householder, a gentleman at large, independent and free. This in the case of any ordinary individual. But when it is the case of a youth of mind and culture, there are added many other feelings to enhance the charm of the new

position. How deeply must such a one be stirred by the associations of the place and their power. The seat of learning is alive with the dead, with the memory of all those men who went out from it to the world beyond, and left great names behind them.

The possibility of being even as they is before him, since what man hath done man may do. Everything is before him as it was before them. Life and its possibilities, success, fame, and distinction.

Such feelings were all in turn experienced by our hero in his new life.

In his case too were added to the leisure, liberty, and sense of independence, the relief of having escaped from an atmosphere of dislike and suspicion, and the strain of an uncongenial companionship.

Here he was far removed from all depressing influences and surroundings, from the shadow of jealousy, and the sense of being in the way.

Here he found free scope for his own thirst for knowledge and love of study.

Here, buried in his books, he could live in the

past, or holding converse with all sorts of men, could hear opinions discussed, debated, and looked at from all points of view. He enjoyed thoroughly the contact with cultivated minds and intellects; and began to realise "the vastness of the sea of knowledge," and the "diversity of all shades of human opinion."

"A born student," had been his uncle's exclamation soon after he made his acquaintance.

"A born orator, and a close reasoner," the debating societies he joined soon declared.

Two years passed away. Godfrey had spent many vacations at Seaforth; but all communication between him and little Joan was still ruthlessly cut off. In all that time, he had never been more than ten minutes with her alone; and even these brief meetings had been purely accidental.

All resuming of their former state of pleasant intercourse and companionship was out of the question.

Joan was too closely watched to make it possible. Nurse and governess were alike under Lady Seaforth's orders, and tools in her hands. It was

useless to try and break through them, worse than useless—cruel.

Any such infringements would only have brought down upon the head of little Joan a swift retribution. So of these brief meetings they made the very most, and lived on the hope of them from day to day.

Faint glimpses they gave him of her dawning mind, and filled him more and more with admiration of her noble and unselfish character.

She was hardly a child now; her natural thoughtfulness was deepened by the solitary life she led, and both in thoughtfulness and in intelligence she was far beyond her years.

Dawning upon him faintly was a dream of days to come.

Softly at evening it came floating over him that a time might come when he might take her happiness into his own safe keeping, into the shelter of his own love and care; shield her for ever from all pain and persecution, and make her young life glad!

His career at college was thoroughly satisfactory to his uncle. A great career was confidently predicted for him. Lord Seaforth's heart swelled with joy and pride at the thought.

There were no bounds to his dreams, or to his ambition for his darling. A second William Pitt; perhaps Prime Minister at an early age. Who should say?

Godfrey would be twenty-two about the time the next general election was expected; and as soon as he was twenty-one his uncle bought him a house in London near Westminster, and gave him an allowance of two thousand a year. His own private intention was to come up to London and live a good deal with him. He saw himself sitting, in fancy, in the peers' gallery, listening to Godfrey's oratory, and hearing whispers of his growing fame.

There now therefore remained about a year of Godfrey's university life, and then he was to stand for the county, and by entering the House of Commons plant his foot on the first rung of the ladder of fame and distinction, which his proud and happy uncle felt sure he was destined to climb.

CHAPTER II.

The Gathering of the Cloud.

It was at about this time that a great and mysterious change came over Godfrey.

His uncle, watching him as usual as he read, observed how often his book dropped upon his knee, and he sat gazing into the fire in disturbed and gloomy thought.

It was not study or meditation, such as he had been wont to see him indulge in. It was more like the abstraction of someone who had something on his mind, and the fit of moody thought would often end in an abrupt return to his book, as if he were forcing himself to resume it, in order to banish uneasy thoughts and to drive the gloom away.

Often he sat with his book before him, and did not turn over the leaves for half an hour.

Lord Seaforth noticed all this with ever-increasing anxiety. A feeling of alarm, and a dread of

impending trouble, took possession of him, and he longed to question his nephew, and to beg him to take him into his confidence. But he felt it would be useless, unless Godfrey chose to do so of his own accord.

From day to day he hoped he might speak, and give him some clue to his disturbed state of mind.

But he hoped in vain.

Godfrey remained silent, and Lord Seaforth saw him depart at the end of the vacation with a feeling of vague uneasiness.

All this time the husband and wife were drifting further and further apart.

Ever since she fully realised that he still continued to resent her early deception, and was determined to punish her for it, she had felt her boys' cause to be hopeless.

Ever since she had discovered his early history she had felt equally hopeless about her own.

She at once realised the intensity and the tenacity of his affections; and the intensity and the tenacity of his resentment.

She was frightened at the nature that could silently bear malice so long, and so consistently carry out a scheme of premeditated revenge. A reaction took place in her feelings towards him. In a violent and passionate nature like hers, love and hate lie very close together. And the one now changed places with the other.

She began to hate her husband; to hate his stern cold face, his set, formal speeches, and his courtly and distant manner.

She began to long to get out of his silent presence, and to feel how much happier she should be in London with her boys.

For they never came to Seaforth now. Their future having so entirely changed in its aspect, made it necessary for them to be a great deal in London; and also her way of punishing her husband for his treatment of them was to keep them away from him altogether. She was determined they should not sleep under the same roof. Colin was now in the Foreign Office, as a first step in a diplomatic career. He had come of age some time; but there was no prospect of his ever being rich enough

to live at his little place in Nairnshire, of which she had once spoken so confidently to Lord Seaforth, and it had been re-let for another term of years.

Andrew was at the University. In spite of his mother's wish that he should, under the altered circumstances, abandon the idea of going into the Church, he had been firm to his original intention.

So that she had an excuse for being a great deal in London if she chose; and she began to make use of it, more especially at vacation times, when Andrew was in want of a home.

The punishment, as regarded Lord Seaforth, fell quite flat.

He did not appear to notice the absence of his step-sons from Seaforth, and never made any inquiries about them.

And not only so, but he seemed callous and unobservant as regarded his wife's frequent and protracted visits from home.

He made no objections to her comings and goings, accepted with courtly readiness her some-

what bitterly-expressed reasons for being occupied with her sons, and answered her with his usual set and formal sentences: "Pray do as you please; pray make what arrangements you like."

The fact was, he was glad to be quite alone. His mind was full of troubled thoughts.

For, growing ever in his breast, was that uneasy feeling about his nephew, and dark fears and forebodings were stealing over him.

Was his confidence misplaced after all?

Had Godfrey got into some trouble of which he dared not tell him?

He awaited his return for the next vacation with deep anxiety, though not without a hope that he should find the cloud had passed away, and his darling his old self again.

But to his alarm and disappointment when Godfrey returned he was just the same. If anything, he was worse; more abstracted, more silent. There was a look of settled despondency on his face that was painful to see, and he seemed with the greatest difficulty to force himself to do anything, or to take any pleasure in his usual pursuits.

That he had something on his mind there could be no doubt.

At last some light was thrown upon the matter. It came to Lord Seaforth's knowledge that Godfrey was overdrawn at his banker's for £1,500.

He at once sent for his nephew, and taxed him with his extravagance. He had been, he reminded him, in receipt of £2,000 a year, and that for not longer than seven or eight months, and he was already overdrawn to such a large amount. What had he done with the money?

Godfrey was evidently not only unwilling, but determined to give no explanation of the manner in which it had been spent; and on Lord Seaforth's pressing the question, he answered, with an impatience which was quite foreign to him, and which sat most unnaturally upon him, that he found his allowance wholly inadequate to meet his expenses. It was the very expression his father had used years and years ago, and a cold feeling of dread struck upon Lord Seaforth's heart as the words fell upon his ear. Was history going to be repeated after all?

There flashed across his mind the proverb, "What is bred in the bone will come out in the flesh."

But he was determined not to be hard.

He merely pointed out to his nephew that he could not be speaking the truth when he made such an assertion; and urged him to own he had got into some trouble, and been obliged to spend that large sum in consequence.

But Godfrey would make no such admission.

It was in vain that Lord Seaforth, in a most tender appeal to his feelings, prayed him to confide in him. Godfrey only repeated what he had at first said, that the allowance was wholly inadequate.

Lord Seaforth was terribly upset, but he would not be harsh. He said, after a few moments' thought, that he would make it £2,500 if Godfrey would promise, on his word of honour, to live within that sum; but even this Godfrey would not do.

Lord Seaforth now grew suspicious, and changed his tone.

"I do not want to be hard on you, Godfrey," he said, "but there is something here which I must not

treat with leniency. I should not be doing my duty by you if I did. Many fathers would, in my case, at once deprive their sons of their allowance, and trust them no more. But I believe in you, as you know, and trust you most thoroughly. So I overlook what has passed, and without asking you any questions, trust you for the future. Only, remember, it must not happen again. You are on trial now."

Godfrey thanked him coldly, but did not seem the least relieved, nor touched by his forbearance and generosity. He left his uncle's presence with the same heavy step and clouded brow.

Perhaps the bitterest part to Lord Seaforth in all the bitterness of that interview was that the appeal to his nephew's feelings had been without the slightest effect, and that he had realised more than ever that Godfrey had not a spark of affection for him in his breast.

He loved the boy so dearly, and, alas! he loved him not.

He could have taken him in his arms, and wept over him like David of old, with the old passionate

cry, "Oh, my son! my son! Would God I might suffer for thee!"

And in return, there was in Godfrey's demeanour not only an entire absence of affection, but throughout the conversation there had been a kind of impatient shrinking from his uncle's demonstration of feeling and affection towards him, even a sort of unexpressed antagonism.

CHAPTER III.

The Cloud bursts.

ANOTHER six months passed away, but there was no change in Godfrey.

In spite of the increased allowance he was more and more heavily overdrawn, and on the subject of the disposal of these large sums he remained obstinately silent. Lord Seaforth waited till his University career was over before he took the matter thoroughly in hand. But as soon as Godfrey returned to Seaforth for good he was determined, if he could not extract a confession from him, that he would deprive him of his allowance altogether, and deal with him with the utmost severity.

He summoned him to his presence the day after his arrival, and entered again upon the subject. He began by urging Godfrey to confide in him, and not "to drive him to extremities from which he shrank quite as much as his nephew himself could do."

But Godfrey answered that it was quite impossible.

Struck with a sudden idea, Lord Seaforth suddenly turned upon him and said, "You are supplying your father."

It was a wild hope, and his disappointment was great when the young man replied with a decision which there was no mistaking, "I have never sent my father a five-pound note, and I never will."

"Godfrey," implored Lord Seaforth, "make a free confession. You have been gambling, racing; but only confess, only take me into your confidence, and I freely forgive you. I will overlook all and everything. Speak, I implore you!"

Godfrey remained silent.

"Then!" said Lord Seaforth, "listen to me. You have been taken from poverty and expatriation, and raised to a position all might envy. *I* have done this for you, but I solemnly declare that if you persist in this course I will deprive you of all the advantages I am ready to shower upon you. No spendthrift shall be taken by the hand by me. And remember you can do nothing without my help. Re-

member too that, old as I look, I am only forty-nine. You may be kept out of your inheritance till you are an elderly man. And in the meantime I will do nothing for you—nothing!"

Godfrey received all this in the same apathetic manner.

He would make no promises, pledge himself to nothing.

"But don't you care for yourself?" burst out his uncle. "Have you no family pride, no pride in possession, no feeling for this princely estate, nor for the grand old name that has been handed down to you through countless generations?"

"None," answered Godfrey; "why should I? I was born and bred abroad. I and my sisters are foreigners; you made us so; it was not our doing. But the fact remains. I care nothing for name or property. They are nothing to me."

It was a fearful thrust, and it cut Lord Seaforth to the heart. If he had been harsh to his brother in those old days to which that brother's son was now alluding, he was heavily punished. At that

moment Godfrey Seaforth the outlaw was amply avenged.

"Uncle Harold!" exclaimed Godfrey suddenly, "let us agree, you and I, to cut off this entail. Disinherit me altogether, and leave everything to your own legal heir."

"*My* legal heir!" exclaimed Lord Seaforth.

"Yes," said Godfrey, eagerly, "your daughter! Only in her hands can it be safe, I do assure you."

Lord Seaforth rose from his chair in the surprise of the moment, and then sitting down again, he said scornfully, "I see what you mean. You want the money *now*. You want to bribe me to give you a larger income to make ducks-and-drakes with, by consenting to cut off the entail. True gambler that you are, imbued so truly with a gambler's spirit, you are ready to sacrifice the future for the sake of the present, and to barter your inheritance for a mess of pottage!"

"Not so," answered Godfrey; "you mistake me. I neither ask nor will I accept one shilling from you. I resign my pretensions unconditionally. All I ask

is that you will leave everything to your daughter, and let me go my own way."

Lord Seaforth gazed at him in bewilderment.

"You do not care for your family or your inheritance," he said bitterly; "but what has become of the ambition of which I believed you to be so full? Richly endowed as you are, are all your talents, all your abilities to come to nothing? Your honours of oratory, and all your many gifts? Are you going to shut yourself out from a career of brilliancy and usefulness? from that political life the thoughts of which you held so dear? You can do nothing without money, nor can you stand without my influence. Nor will any constituency take a representative with a brand on his name. And I will denounce you at any hustings. I will hold you up as a gambler and a villain; I swear I will do it, though my heart should break as I said the words."

He had hit the right nail on the head now. At the thought of the crumbling away of that bright dream of distinction and success the young man writhed in his chair. But he made no answer.

Lord Seaforth now dropped the upbraiding, even

threatening tone he had adopted, and made a last mournful and passionate appeal to his nephew's feelings.

"Must I," he concluded, in faltering accents, "must I give up all hope of your confession?"

"*All*," answered Godfrey.

"Very well," said his uncle, in a voice choked with emotion, "*I* can make no impression. To honour, duty, gratitude, and affection you are deaf and blind; but one thing remains." His voice faltered more:—

"You love your mother. That I *know*, and where *I* fail *she* may succeed. I shall send for her."

"Oh, no!" cried Godfrey, springing to his feet with a cry. "Spare her! spare her! Uncle Harold, you do not *know* what you are doing. Spare her the terrible sorrow, the unutterable shame. Oh, spare her! spare her!"

Both were powerfully agitated. But Lord Seaforth saw the advantage he had gained, and would not budge an inch from his position.

"My mind is made up," he said firmly; "nothing that you can say will turn me from my determination."

CHAPTER IV.

At length we meet again, Love.

And so it came to pass that, a few days after this interview, in the room where, four years before, Lord Seaforth had sat waiting for Godfrey, he now sits waiting for Hester.

The carriage has gone to fetch her at the station, and he is expecting her every moment. It is early morning, for she is coming by the night train. She can only be spared from home for two days, and must return to Monaco with all possible speed.

He has not seen her for four-and-twenty years, and those years have of course wrought a change in his feelings towards her.

She is not so much to him now the idol of his youth, as the mother of the idol of his later years; and the thought of her coming does not so much rouse in him the memory of past joys and sorrows concerning himself, as hope that she may be able

to throw some light on his present troubles and perplexities.

And yet he trembles when the door opens and the love of his life stands before him. The rush of old memories would come over him all the same, as his eyes rest once more on the beautiful face which has haunted the chambers of his soul for so long.

It almost seems to him as if she must be transported back to the old days too; that she will let the years roll back, and will speak of that time again.

But there is no answering memory in her look.

All the mother is in those lovely eyes of hers as, after the first hasty glance at Lord Seaforth, they look beyond him and all round the room, as though searching for something on which they had long been yearning to dwell.

That other connexion of her life with his is so far away in the past, it forms so completely a part of her early girlhood, that it is to her only like a tale she had once read and well-nigh forgotten.

And Lord Seaforth felt that it was so. If there was any disappointment in his heart, he concealed

it successfully; and his manner was a mixture of gentleness and deep respect as he advanced to meet her, and then led her to a seat by the fire.

He thanked her earnestly for coming, and for coming so promptly; and then asked her if she would not like some rest and some refreshment before they entered on the painful business which had brought them together. But Hester would have nothing. She could think of nothing but her boy; and she begged him at once to tell her the story from beginning to end. "For I know so little," she said sadly, "so little!"

"But, Lord Seaforth," she added quickly, drawing herself up proudly, "I am full of hope and confidence. I trust my son so fully. My faith in him is so complete."

Lord Seaforth, pained that she should for a moment think it necessary to defend one he loved so deeply, prefaced his narrative by an earnest and pathetic entreaty that she would not think he had been harsh to her boy; and as he did so, his love for Godfrey showed itself so plainly, that the mother's heart was won at once.

"I have no son of my own, as you know," he said in a faltering voice, "but before God, I assure you that I do not believe a son of my own could be dearer to me than your boy."

Hester could hardly restrain her tears of gratitude at the thought that her boy was so loved and appreciated. "God bless you, Harold," she exclaimed; "God bless you for words like these."

The relief it was to speak out, and talk of him to another who loved him so.

Their individual lives and histories were merged at last! merged in one object of mutual love and adoration.

He then gave the whole account of the affair from the beginning as the reader knows it, and detailed all the different conversations he had had with his nephew. When he had finished Hester rose from her seat.

"Now take me to him," she said. "I feel that if I may only speak to him face to face, all will yet be well."

Lord Seaforth led the way, and she followed him with a beating heart.

"Tell me, Harold," she said as they went along, "is he tall? Is he handsome as when I sent him to you?"

"He is beautiful as the day," he answered in a trembling voice, "and taller than I am myself."

As they turned down the passage that led to Godfrey's rooms, and stood outside his door, her step suddenly faltered. A great fear came into her heart at the thought of the coming interview. It was a man past twenty-one she was now going to see, and not the boy of seventeen with whom she had parted.

"Nearly four years," she said to herself. "Will he be quite what I remember? Is he not almost a stranger to me? How will he meet me under these new and unhappy circumstances?"

She must have him to herself. No other human eye must see the meeting between them.

"Leave us, Harold," she said beseechingly, turning to Lord Seaforth; "leave me and my boy together. I must meet him alone."

Lord Seaforth opened the door with a trembling hand, and remained as she desired in the passage.

"Godfrey, my darling!" he hears her cry as she enters. "My precious boy, come to me."

He hears no answer, no sound; and in an agitated voice, he calls out to her to go through the study into the bed-room beyond, for that perhaps he is not yet dressed. And unable to bear the suspense, he follows her, and they stand together in the doorway, as in a dream.

A dead silence follows; broken by a low cry of pain.

For the rooms are both empty; the bed is unslept on; and it is clear that Godfrey has fled!

CHAPTER V.

Husband and Wife.

LADY SEAFORTH had been spending some weeks with her sons in London, but as they had now both gone on a visit to Lady Margaret Cartwright, she prepared to go back to Seaforth. She had not heard anything from home for a long period, and she felt it was time to return.

She wrote to her husband to announce her advent; and she arrived on the evening of the day after that on which the events recorded in the last chapter had occurred.

She was greeted with the astounding news that Lord Seaforth was away from home, and, on advancing into the hall, she saw her own letter to him lying unopened upon the table.

This was just the sort of thing which Lady Seaforth could not stand.

She could not bear that the servants should see

how completely her husband kept her in ignorance of his movements, and how little communication there was by letter between them.

She would gladly have asked nothing more and pretended she knew all about it; but bewilderment and curiosity impelled her to put a few questions.

The answers nearly took her breath away.

Lord Seaforth had left very early that morning, and had gone to Folkestone with Mrs. Seaforth, who was to cross that night. Mrs. Seaforth had been staying at the house since the morning before. She had arrived from abroad on Tuesday, and was obliged to return immediately.

A few more short sharp questions from Lady Seaforth and she was in possession of the news with which the butler was bursting; with which the whole place was ringing. Mr. Seaforth had got into trouble and had gone no one knew where. He had taken flight in the middle of the night, and no clue to his whereabouts could be discovered.

"His lordship," added the butler, feelingly, "was terribly cut up. He seemed quite knocked over,

and as to Mr. Seaforth's mother, she had looked more dead than alive when she left."

Lady Seaforth felt quite stunned with all these startling pieces of information. Godfrey disgraced and flown!

That was the first feeling, and a feeling of wild exultation it was. But above the triumph of the fall of her enemy was a burning resentment against her husband for the way in which he had treated her, and the humiliating state of ignorance in which he had kept her. He must have known for some time past that *something* was impending; it could not have been a new or sudden thing to him, since he had had time to summon his sister-in-law to his help.

And he had never told her a word! Never written her a line! Had kept her completely in the dark!

Hastily escaping from the inquisitive eye of the butler and men-servants, she made her way to her own boudoir, breathless with the rush of wild anger and rebellion which swept over her.

She could not sit still. She walked up and

down the room panting. She persuaded herself she had seen the servants laughing and exchanging meaning glances with each other. It maddened her.

She sat down positively trembling with rage, fiercely biting her lips almost through, while passionate and incoherent exclamations every now and then escaped from her.

At length a rattle of wheels in the courtyard below announced the return of her husband, and, looking out, she saw him getting out of the carriage.

At the sight of him her passion broke out with renewed strength. She would have it out with him at once. He should hear the truth at last! Many, many years she had restrained herself, and kept it all down, but he should hear it now.

If it came to a quarrel and a breach between them, what then?

Could anything be worse than the present state of affairs?

She was determined to return to London that

very night. Nothing will make her stay! But he shall hear the truth first!

She rang the bell, and desired that the carriage should remain at the door till further orders.

Then she went across the hall, up the corridor that led to the library, and knocked imperiously and impatiently at the door.

. . . . . .

Lord Seaforth entered the house weary and heart-broken, despairing, and sore and sick in spirit.

There was no doubt about Godfrey's guilt now. He would not meet his mother, all views of the subject met and ended in that. There was the proof of his guilt. All hope was over. There remained nothing now but to harden his heart, and cast him off for ever, and it should be done. But he did not look much like a Nemesis as he sat there, cowering over the fire, holding his shaking hands to the blaze, his lips quivering, and the proud tears rising to his sunken and weary eyes. It is the bitterest moment of his life; more bitter even than when the love of his life had fled with his vagabond brother.

Hester had been the idol of months, but Godfrey was the idol of years.

Oh! how lonely and how crushed he felt.

Ah! Lady Seaforth, this would have been your moment. Your rival gone, and lowered in his eyes; cast off for ever; his heart aching and sad. Could you have stolen in now gently, just as his heart is so sore, and craved his pardon for that old deception, and begged him to condone it as an offence of youth; begged him to gauge your love for your boys by his own love for his nephew, and to look upon you as one who had erred for the sake of her children, you might have won him still!

But, instead! there bursts into his presence a woman mad with fury, a woman who stands over him and glories in his grief; who taunts him with the way he has been taken in, and tells him she always knew his nephew was bad and worthless, and had said so from the very first; who triumphs over his misery, and then heaps upon him the bitterest reproaches; who reviews all her married life, and recapitulates every grievance and every injury which she says she has had to suffer at his hands;

who accuses him of every sort of cruelty and neglect; who tells him she will remain with him no longer to be treated in such a way as this, to be shut out alike from his joys and his sorrows, to be humiliated before the whole household, and kept in such ignorance of his affairs, that every servant in the house is better informed than she; who lets loose, in short, all the pent-up torrent of years, and, regardless alike of his feelings or his displeasure, allows that torrent to have its full vent, and to burst as it will the bounds of truth, respect, and decorum. Self-control is no more; habitual awe and fear have fled. Alike violent and intemperate in speech, manner, and tone, she gives way freely to her feelings and her temper, and—is degraded in his eyes for ever!

Exhausted at last by her own passion, she comes to an end of her vocabulary of vituperation; and she rushes out of his presence, dashing the hot tears of fury from her eyes, as she goes away and away through the passages, across the hall, to the entrance where the carriage is still standing at the door.

The presence of the men-servants restores to her for a moment some sense of what is due to appearances, and she enters the carriage with something of dignity, and controls her voice to give the necessary orders before she drives out into the cold foggy night.

Then she throws herself back among the cushions, and the carriage rattles out of the courtyard.

But, as she drove rapidly away in the darkness, she sat up suddenly, and let down the window to take one last look at the home she felt she was leaving for ever.

The stately old house looked grim and phantom-like in the fog which was beginning to encircle it. No lights gleamed from the windows. The state rooms were closed, the guests' rooms untenanted, her boys' rooms dark and empty.

She gazed at it with a beating heart, hastily reviewing her life in it, with all its hopes, dreams, mortifications, and disappointments.

The contrast between this day and those early ones, when she had been so gay and happy, so

pleased with her new position, and so secure of her boys' prosperous future, forced itself upon her.

The contrast too between the gaunt, deserted look of the mansion now, and its aspect in those days, when it was made so bright for feasting and hospitality. Where once each window had been a blaze of light, now all was darkness.

One more hasty glance before she disappears in the fog, never to return.

Something causes her to throw herself hastily back in the carriage, and a sudden sharp pang of bitter remorse strikes through her heart, penetrating even the hard cold wall with which that heart was encircled, and melting for a moment the ice of her proud rebellion and resentment against her life, her fate, and her husband.

Her eye had fallen for a moment on a tiny glimmer, shining faint and small in the darkness.

Far away in one of the upper storeys of the house, a little light in the schoolroom window had spoken to her pathetically of her neglected and deserted child!

CHAPTER VI.

"Not Wanted."

SHORT work did Lord Seaforth make of his wife's concerns; short work indeed.

The very thought of her for days and days after that scene in the library was enough to make his lip curl with the most ineffable contempt and disdain.

She shall never return to Seaforth. She shall be banished evermore.

There shall be no formal separation, no publicity of any kind. It shall just be settled that for the future she shall make her home in London.

Did she not herself propose it? So far as he could follow the course of the intemperate language used on that occasion, he had gathered that that was her meaning.

Thus, then, for the future it shall be.

So that matter was promptly and finally settled, and then he turned his back upon that part of his life, and entered on a new stage of his existence.

Yes, he has cast off all the past—wife, stepsons, nephew; all the associations of the last sixteen years, and a new future is opening out before him. A new programme is shaping itself in his mind.

What can this new programme be?

He is going, as Godfrey himself had suggested, to cut off the entail, and to settle everything on his daughter. She will then be one of the greatest heiresses in England; and her second son shall inherit the property and take the family name.

He has even got a son-in-law in his eye; the eldest son of his neighbour and acquaintance Lord Ainsbro', whose estates join his own.

But for all this he must wait. These plans cannot be carried out yet. He must wait till Godfrey is five-and-twenty, by which time Joan will be past eighteen.

His life will now be waiting, waiting—and then! this new future and this fresh programme of life.

So, still unsubdued, from the ashes of another past, his will, phœnix-like, springs with a new force.

Again, no thought of submission, no bowing to the hand of God.

As determined as ever to carve out his own life; to make it what he deems it should be. The tide of time has taught him no lessons; he has learnt nothing from its flow. The waves of life have but borne him on a little further, and carried him up a little higher on the shore.

Yet in this matter, wherein his love, his pride, his trust, and his ambition have all alike suffered, he does not come out quite unscathed from the fight. The hard lines on the face, the bent figure, and the snow-white hair; a certain nervous trembling of the hands, and an occasional uncertainty of gait, all testify to a partial defeat.

And thus we leave him for the present, to wait till those three years shall have passed away.

Alone, all alone, in his empty house, his deserted rooms, his silent, echoless halls, the proud man passes into another phase of his curious life of self-will and failures.

All alone did I say?

Yes. Save but for the silent presence in the rooms above of his neglected and unloved daughter, living out her young life all alone too.

And yet, after all, all his hopes are now centered upon her.

His new programme of life, with all its dreams and projects, hangs now entirely on that fair young girl; the child who has borne from her birth the brand "not wanted" on her brow.

BOOK VI.

CHAPTER I.

The Enchanted Orange Grove.

Not quite three years after the events recounted in the last chapter, a young Englishman might have been seen strolling along the country which lies between Nice and Monaco.

Tall and fair, with an open countenance and bright, laughing eyes, the reader will have no difficulty in recognising Colin Fraser, now a fine-looking young man of six or seven-and-twenty.

He had been wandering somewhat lazily along, for the heat was very overpowering, and he was hoping every moment to find some shade, when his ear was suddenly caught by the sound of voices not far distant, and he stopped short and listened.

What he heard evidently excited his surprise and his interest, for he at once left the dusty road, and turned off to the right upon a mule track, which seemed to him to lead to the spot from whence the sounds proceeded. Following this little path,

he found himself being led further down into the valley, till it entered a grove of olives, and there it stopped. Colin stopped too, and looked about him. He saw rising above the trees, close at hand, the roof of a little châlet, and it was from between the olives and the châlet that the sounds which had attracted him seemed to come.

He listened again. No, he had not been mistaken, they were laughing girls' voices he had heard —English voices; he could hear them more plainly now.

After a moment's thought he pushed his way through the olives, and parting the branches of two which grew rather close together, and emerging from their shade, he came suddenly upon a scene which he never afterwards forgot. Three lovely English girls, wearing the picturesque hats of the country, which protected while they did not hide their pretty features and bright complexions, were sitting in an orange grove.

One was working, one reading, and the third making garlands of the wild flowers which were lying all round her.

Colin was so taken by surprise, and so struck with the beauty of the scene, the beauty of the young girls, and the beauty of the shade and coolness of their retreat, upon which he had come so suddenly, that he stood gazing fixedly without attempting to move.

Startled at the sudden appearance of a stranger, the young girls sprang to their feet and looked at Colin in astonishment.

He recovered himself at the sight of their alarm, and stepping forward with a slight blush, he took off his hat, and apologised for his intrusion.

"I beg ten thousand pardons, ladies," he said, as he bowed respectfully, "but I had no idea what I was coming upon. You must excuse me if the surprise of suddenly coming on such a scene as this, where I expected to find only washerwomen, should for the moment have overpowered me. The sight of English ladies at home in these solitudes made a boor of me at once, and I could only stare as the boors do."

He laughed as he spoke, but he was still so

confused and astonished that he was more nearly feeling shy than he had ever done in his life before.

The young girls' high-bred appearance, and a sense of something like familiarity with their appearance; a kind of dream-like feeling of having seen them somewhere before; all this bewildered and, as he said himself, overpowered him.

The three sisters were looking at him all this time with interest. His gentlemanlike demeanour reassured them at once, and his frank courtesy prepossessed them in his favour.

Olive was the first to speak. "Who are you?" she said, "and where do you come from?"

"I am an Englishman," he answered, "and I come from Monaco."

"What brings you here?" was the next question, "and how *did* you find the secret path to our châlet?"

Colin felt very much as if he were in Fairyland. It seemed to him he was like some of the wandering princes he had read of, who, following some unknown path through a labyrinth, had come upon

an enchanted region, peopled by fairer beings than the rough outer world contained.

"It was the soft sound of English voices," he answered, "which attracted my attention, and guided me here!"

"Why, you said you thought we were chattering washerwomen," she said, with a pretty little toss of her pretty head. "Paysannes have the most hideous voices in the world, just like a lot of magpies. Besides, I don't think we were talking at that moment, Hester was reading out loud. It was a poor compliment to her reading, wasn't it?"

Colin felt rather embarrassed, and to hide it he said, "What were you reading? The Pastorals, I am sure. I feel as if I had stepped into a bit of Pastoral poetry myself. Perhaps Miss Hester will kindly go on."

"Why, how did you know her name?" said Olive, astonished. "Do you know mine, too?"

"You called your sister by that name just now," he answered. "I have not yet had the pleasure of hearing yours; but I can assure you that if you will tell it to me I shall never forget it!"

"My name is Olive," she said, "and I am called after the dear old trees."

As she spoke, she twined her arms round the branches of the one under which she was standing, and looked more picturesque than ever. "And the little one is Venetia," she added, "or, as she is generally called, Venice."

"Olive and Venice!" repeated Colin; "what lovely and romantic names."

"Well, you have not told us your name yet," continued Olive, who was now getting quite at her ease, and talking as she would have talked to her father, who was almost the only gentleman she had ever seen. "And you know all ours now. Neither have you told us what you are doing here!"

"I am making what we call in England a 'walking tour,'" he answered. "I wanted to see what all this country was like."

"But it's very hot for walking," she said; "we should never think of walking this time of the day."

"So I found it," he said, with a little laugh. "I was walking at the rate of five miles an hour up

there on the dusty road, and I was beginning to long for a little shade."

"Oh, now I guess who you are!" she exclaimed; "you must be Mr. Waukenphast, the original of the picture in Bradshaw. You needn't tell me your name now. I shall call you Mr. Waukenphast."

"That will do very well," he answered, laughing, "but I am ready to tell you anything you wish to know, and to answer any question you may please to put to me."

"Won't you sit down," said Hester's soft voice, "before Olive begins her questions? You must be tired after this long, hot walk you speak of."

He thanked her, and they all sat down.

"Well, now," said Olive, "let us begin. Where do you come from?"

"From Monaco," he answered.

"Ah, yes, I know, but I mean before you came to Monaco."

"Before that I came from Berlin, at which court I hold the proud and lucrative position of an unpaid attaché!"

"Don't they pay you anything at all?" she exclaimed.

"Not a sou," was the reply. "*Tant pis pour moi!*"

"Then I wouldn't be an attaché, I am sure."

"Beggars cannot be choosers," he answered lightly, "and in these days we poor Englishmen are glad to get anything we can, which *may* lead to something better some day."

"Oh, then it will lead to something, some day?"

"*Some* day, perhaps, it *may* lead to envoy extraordinary, but it will be very extraordinary if it does."

"And in the meantime——?"

"In the meantime, I come to Monaco, and lose my money at *rouge et noir*, like a fool, as I am."

"But I thought you said you *had* no money, and were a very poor man."

"Ah! well I *am* a very poor man, but then I have always been brought up as if I were a rich one, and so I make mistakes sometimes. The lessons taught us in our youth, Miss Olive, are very difficult to unlearn, and I am going through that process with difficulty and great pain."

"Before you came to Berlin, you lived in England, I suppose, did you not?" asked Hester.

"Yes," he replied, "I did. But Scotland is my real home, my native land, as they say."

"And what brought you from Berlin to Monaco?" asked Olive.

"The ambassador is at Nice for a little while, and I came with him," he answered.

"And what do you think of Monaco?"

"It's the loveliest place in all the world," he answered, "and the wickedest. But have you not been there?"

"No, never. Mamma never will allow us to go."

"I think she is right. I intend to get away from it myself as fast as I can. I ought not to have come, or rather, I ought not to have played. However, I was soon cured of it. But, as I tell you, I always forget I am a poor man, and having always been accustomed to think I could go in for everything, why in I go! And of course I ought to remember that I oughtn't even to buy a new boot lace till I'm quite sure the old one is really worn out."

"No, of course not," laughed Olive. "We

should never think of such a thing. Why, we haven't had new gowns for I don't know how long; and as to our hats ——!"

She took off her broad paysanne hat, and showed it to Colin. "Do you see, it is quite sunburnt," she said. "Now guess how many years I have worn it."

"It couldn't be prettier if it was bran new," said Colin. "It's the prettiest hat I have ever seen."

"And I am sure," put in little Venetia, "it's better the hat should be sunburnt than Olive, isn't it?"

"Yes, that it is, indeed," said Colin, warmly. "I can't think how you ladies shield yourselves from the effects of the sun so successfully. The paysannes are all quite burnt brown."

"Mamma is very particular about our complexions," said Olive, simply.

"By the way," said Colin, "will you not introduce me to your mother?"

"She has gone to Nice," exclaimed Olive; "isn't it extraordinary? She has not done such a thing

as long as I can remember. She won't be back till late. So we are taking care of ourselves to-day."

"And," said Colin, "if you will not think me inquisitive, have you a father also?"

"Yes," she said shortly, "but he's always more or less away."

Colin felt as if he ought not to ask any more questions, though he longed to know why these lovely girls were hidden away in these wilds, and what the history of the family might be.

"Well, ladies," he said regretfully, looking at his watch, "I must be going. It is sad to leave such a Paradise, but it must be. I must return to Paradise Lost, as they call Monaco."

"Oh! but the train does not start for at least an hour," exclaimed Olive. "You really must not go yet!"

"Won't you have something to eat in the meanwhile?" said Hester; "you must be hungry and thirsty, and you will be glad to wash your face and hands after your long dusty walk."

He looked at them all for a moment, and hesitated. "I don't know if I ought," he said.

"Why not?" asked Olive.

"There's no chaperon, you see," he said.

"No *what?*" exclaimed Olive.

Colin did not seem to be inclined to explain himself, and, after a moment's thought, he accepted the invitation.

They all walked towards the châlet, and the girls took him into their father's room, which was deliciously cool, all paved with white tiles. All three hovered about, getting it ready, on hospitable thoughts intent.

Olive came in with a large classically-shaped pitcher on her head, which she had herself filled with hot water in the little kitchen, and set it down before him. Colin hastened to relieve her of it, exclaiming with horror at her having given herself so much trouble.

"The water is too hot," she said, "I must go and get some cold." As she spoke, she heaved up the pitcher again.

"Oh! don't you do it!" exclaimed Colin; "please let me ring!"

She stood before him, with her arm round the pitcher on her shoulder, laughing merrily.

"Ring!" she exclaimed, "who for?"

"For one of the servants," he answered. "I cannot let you wait upon me like this."

"*Servants!*" she repeated, laughing more than ever, "why, we've only got one, and of course she's getting your dinner ready."

"You might be Rebecca at the well," he said in answer. "I almost expect to hear you say, 'Drink, my lord!'"—But Olive was already out of hearing of these observations.

The meal was very simple, but tastefully set upon the table. Colin found he was expected to eat alone, as the girls declared their intention of awaiting their mother's return from Nice.

They hovered round him, providing for his wants, and would not allow him to get a single thing for himself, in spite of his protestations.

"No!" said Olive decidedly, "when we come to see you, you shall wait upon us; but now you are eating of *our* salt, and we must wait upon you."

Colin was indeed sorry when at last it was decided he must start if he wished to be in time for the train.

"But you'll come and see us again," said Olive, imploringly, as she said "Good-bye," "and very soon."

"That I will," he answered, "and you must introduce me to your mother."

The three girls came out on the balcony to see him go, and leant over the railings, waving their hands to him till he was almost out of sight.

Olive remained there the longest, shading her eyes with her hands, as she strained her gaze after his departing figure.

When she could no longer see him, she sighed. Everything, somehow, seemed different to what it had been in the morning, and she had lost all interest in the book Hester was reading.

Meanwhile Colin, after taking one last look at the figure on the balcony, sighed also.

And as he pursued his way back to Paradise Lost, he felt as if he were turning his back on Paradise Regained.

CHAPTER II.

Lord Seaforth and his Daughter.

THE rolling of the wheels of Time had done but little to better Joan's position.

Little as she had ever seen of her mother and half-brothers, their total disappearance from the scene, and the disappearance with them of all life and society and movement from the house and place, rendered everything more dull and dreary than ever. The only change, as regarded herself, was the fact of being brought more in contact with her father. For Lord Seaforth, urged by his rigid sense of duty, had, very soon after his wife's departure, sent up a message to the schoolroom, that for the future his daughter and her governess would dine with him.

But that is some time ago. Joan is now past eighteen. Her governess has been gone a long while. Unable to bear the dulness of the life, she

had returned to her friends abroad; and her place had not been filled up.

Joan is now a good deal with her father; that is to say, in his presence; otherwise they were miles apart, and very little conversation ever passed between them.

Still, Lord Seaforth's feelings towards his daughter are very much warmer than they used to be. The very fact of her being his heir at once created in his breast an interest in her which he had never felt before.

He gives her a good deal of power in the place, and as much money as she wishes for: and is ready to further any schemes for good that she may wish to promote. She has made herself a home in the hearts of the poor; and wherever there is trouble there is Joan ever at hand to help, more especially if a little invalid, or a lonely child be in question.

But it is a lonely, lonely life for a young girl; her own heart is void and empty, and it has no one on whom its treasures of affection may be poured.

Hers are golden memories, but no present joys.

She lives still on the memory of those sunny days when love and sympathy were showered upon her; and, except them, all is blank in her life, and succeeding events shrouded in a deep and impenetrable mystery.

Let us look in upon the father and daughter, sitting in the library to-night. It wants just about three months to the day for which Lord Seaforth has been waiting so long; three months to the 26th of January, Godfrey's twenty-fifth birthday.

Lord Seaforth is sitting in his usual chair, gazing into the fire. His daughter is bending over her book, under the soft light of a reading lamp, which shines on her small well-shaped head, with its fair rippling hair. A very lovely girl has the lonely child become. Even her father's eyes are not closed to his daughter's beauty, and there is not a man or a boy about the place who is not in love with little Joan.

The usual silence is reigning in the room.

It was broken by the sound of a little cough from Lord Seaforth. He spoke so seldom that his voice got husky, and no sound would come unless he first prepared the way.

The little cough was a sign that he was going to speak, and at the sound his daughter raised her eyes from her book, and waited to hear what he was going to say.

"Joan."

"Yes, father."

"How old are you now?"

"I was eighteen last month."

"I thought you must be nearly that age. You are growing up now, Joan."

"Yes, father."

"You ought to be seeing something of society, like others of your age. This is a gloomy house, and a gloomy life for a young girl; but that cannot be altered. You must seek change and society elsewhere."

Here he paused, and took a letter out of his pocket.

"I have an invitation for you here from my friends Lord and Lady Ainsbro', inviting you to pass a few days with them next week. Lady Ainsbro' says she has no particular inducements to offer you in the shape of amusements, but she thinks you

will not perhaps mind that. She has at present with her one of her married daughters, her eldest son, and some of her younger children. I have a great opinion of Lady Ainsbro'. She has brought up her sons and daughters well; and her eldest son is a particularly worthy and promising young man."

Another pause.

"I have accepted the invitation, and it only remains for you to make the necessary arrangements. The distance is five-and-twenty miles, across country. The railway will not assist you. I shall, therefore, send you and your maid in the carriage the whole way."

Lord Seaforth then returned the letter to his pocket, and said nothing further.

Joan did not resume her book. Her thoughts turned with pleasure to the change.

The idea of a house with young people and little children in it was very pleasant, and she dimly remembered having once met Lady Ainsbro' on the stairs when she had been staying at Seaforth, and that she had stopped her and spoken to her very kindly.

CHAPTER III.

Joan's First Visit from Home.

LADY AINSBRO'S family consisted of some married daughters, a grown-up son, and some younger children.

She had originally intended Godfrey for one of those daughters, but events having put that out of the question, they had married elsewhere; and now her favourite plan was that her son should marry Lord Seaforth's daughter, and unite the two properties. She had found that she and Lord Seaforth were fully agreed as to the wisdom of such an arrangement, and Joan's visit to Ainsbro' was the preliminary step to its accomplishment.

She had asked no one to meet her. She knew what a solitary life the girl led, and thought she would be more at ease in a home circle than with a regular party. She was a kind, motherly woman, and had always felt much for the forlorn child; but

the great distance between the two houses, unconnected as they were by any railway, had prevented her being able to do anything for her.

At about five o'clock in the afternoon, after a long drive of twenty-five miles, Joan arrived at the gates of Ainsbro' Park.

She felt rather nervous, and very uncertain how she should comport herself under such new circumstances.

She was reassured directly by Lady Ainsbro's kind, motherly greeting. She received her alone in the drawing-room, made her sit down by the fire to warm herself after her cold drive, and gave her some tea, talking kindly to her all the time.

Lord Ainsbro' and her son, she said, were out shooting, but would be back ere long, and the children would be down directly. She hoped Joan would not mind a family party. Her daughter, who had been with her, she was sorry to say, had been obliged to return home, on account of the illness of her baby.

As Joan sat there drinking her tea, listening to the kind voice, and receiving all the motherly at-

tentions to which she was so unaccustomed, a feeling of warmth and comfort stole into her heart, and she felt she would be very happy at Ainsbro'.

"Are the children quite little?" she inquired, looking up eagerly.

"Yes, two of them are nursery children still, a boy and a girl, Marion and Bertie. They are just at the right age," she added smiling, "independent of the nursery, and not yet in the schoolroom, so I have them with me nearly all day, and a most amusing little pair they are. Will you come up to your room before they come down? They will never let you go after. They are so fond of society!"

Joan followed Lady Ainsbro' to her bed-room, and took off her things.

When she returned to the drawing-room the children were already there, and they ran forward and greeted Joan with great pleasure.

Joan sat down and took the little boy in her lap. Her love for children was a passion which as yet had been confined to the children of the poor. No one could guess what it was to the poor forlorn

child to wind her arms round the little fellow, and to bury her face in his soft hair.

The attraction was mutual. Bertie was evidently greatly smitten. He took a prolonged look at her, and then settled himself comfortably astride on her knee, and asked her to tell him a story or to show him some pictures.

"You musn't tell Bertie anything sad," whispered little Marion, "because it makes him so unhappy. You musn't let anybody die, or be cruel, or else he'll begin to cry. And nobody must be unkind, or ill, or unhappy."

As there seemed so many rocks ahead in the matter of story-telling, Joan sheltered herself from possible dangers by saying she thought she would rather show them some pictures. Marion therefore fetched a large volume of *Punch*, and placed it on her knee. "But don't let Bertie see any wild beasts," she whispered; "no lions, or wolves, or bears, because he talks about them at night, and thinks they're under his bed, or peeping at him from behind the curtain."

Punch appeared to Joan to be a volume likely to be free from all terrors, and the entertainment began.

But they came at once upon the "British Lion" in one of the big political cartoons; and the peace of the evening seemed seriously threatened.

Joan hastily turned over several pages, and fell foul of a skeleton, wrapped in a sheet, rowing a boat.

This being at present an unknown danger, Bertie was at first considerably interested, and it led to a conversation on bones; but on a closer inspection of the illustration, he suddenly shuddered, and covering it up with his hands, said, "Better not look at it any more."

"Do you know," said Marion to Joan, in an awe-struck whisper, "I once heard somebody say there was a skeleton in the cupboard. I wonder," she added, looking rather fearfully round the room "I wonder which cupboard it's in!"

"Oh, dear!" cried Bertie, his blue eyes dilating with fright, "I hope it's not in the nursery cupboard!"

"No, no, darlings," said Joan soothingly, "I am quite sure there is no skeleton in *this* house."

"Is there one in yours?" asked Marion.

Joan blushed deeply. She saw Lady Ainsbro' was listening with some curiosity, and her relief was great when the entrance of Lord Ainsbro' and his son interrupted the conversation and diverted the children's attention.

Lord Ainsbro' received her very kindly; and after a few words of inquiry after her father, &c. he sat down by the fire and took up the newspaper.

Edward Manners was a tall, nice-looking young man of about six-and-twenty.

Lady Ainsbro' came forward and introduced him, and he sat down by Joan's side, and entered into conversation with her.

"The Mayor of York is dead," said Lord Ainsbro' to his wife, presently.

Lady Ainsbro' expressed surprise and regret, and a little conversation followed on the manner of his death, and his probable successor.

Joan suddenly discovered that Bertie was weeping.

"Oh! what is the matter with him?" she exclaimed to Mr. Manners; "poor little fellow! He is crying."

"What's the matter, old fellow?" inquired Mr. Manners, raising his little brother in his arms.

"I wish the Mayor of York hadn't died, poor thing," sobbed Bertie; "I don't want him to be dead at all."

His brother hastily explained to him that the late mayor had gone to heaven, where he would be so much happier than he could be at York.

Bertie allowed himself to be consoled by this reflection, observing mournfully, "So should *I* be much happier in heaven than I am here."

"Come and play at cheeses," said Marion.

It was a new game, and for the present, while the novelty lasted, it was in her eyes the panacea for all ills.

Bertie entered at once into the spirit of the game, and twisted round till he got giddy and nearly fell over.

"Don't!" he called out to Joan, who was sitting

very quiet in her big arm-chair, "don't you go round when I do this!"

Lady Ainsbro' now stopped the game, and took the children off to bed.

The dinner passed off pleasantly. They were all so kind that Joan could not but feel at her ease.

In the evening Edward Manners played the violin to his mother's accompaniment, and Joan listened, while Lord Ainsbro' slumbered peacefully in his chair.

It was all very homelike and comfortable, and she went to bed feeling very much more what is called "at home" at Ainsbro' than ever she had felt at Seaforth.

The next day was Sunday. In the morning they all went to church, and in the afternoon they took a long walk.

Lord and Lady Ainsbro' and the children went on in front, and Joan and Edward Manners walked behind.

"The young people are getting on famously," said Lady Ainsbro', with a smile, to her husband, in

the course of the walk. "What a lovely little thing she is!"

"Wonderful eyes," he observed; "I never saw any with so deep and so varying an expression. She looks very sad, poor child. I fancy there is a great deal of character hidden under a very gentle exterior.

"I don't believe she knows the least how pretty she is," added Lady Ainsbro', "she seems so unconscious, and so free from any sort of vanity. Altogether, I think, she is charming."

When, about an hour later, they reached the house in time for the children's tea, Lady Ainsbro' noticed, with great satisfaction, that her son and his companion were still far behind.

When the children came down at six o'clock Lady Ainsbro' read them "Mamma's Bible Stories."

Joan was sitting near, with her book in her lap; and she did not hear much at first, but when Lady Ainsbro' put down the book, and began to ask a few questions, she could not help listening to the children's answers.

"Once upon a time," said Lady Ainsbro', "there

was no world. All was dark and empty. There was no such little boy or girl as you, nor——"

"No," set off Marion, "nor no such a woman as you, nor no such a nurse as Nana, nor no such a footman as Charles, nor no——"

"That will do," said Lady Ainsbro'. "No, there was no one in the world, and nothing. Now what was the first thing God made? Marion, you must let Bertie answer this."

"Adam and Eve," said Bertie, promptly.

"Oh, no, Bertie," whispered Marion, "they'd have been all in the dark, you know."

"Well," said Lady Ainsbro," "you tell me."

"Light," said Marion; "sun, moon,——"

"Let Bertie go on. What other kind of light, Bertie?"

"Gas," said Bertie.

"Oh, no, Bertie," said his sister, "God doesn't make the gas. Smith makes the gas."

"Tell him," said Lady Ainsbro'.

"Stars," they both said together.

"God *could* make the gas, if He liked," argued Bertie, "for He can do everything, you know."

"Yes," said Marion, "He can write with his fingers, like when He wrote the Commandments on the tables of stone."

"I wish *I* could write with my fingers," said Bertie, mournfully: adding, after a moment's deep and interested thought, "of course, God's got plenty of pens, only He likes better writing with his fingers."

Lady Ainsbro' now dropped the questioning form, and read aloud to them a little till the gong sounded, and Bertie dissolved in tears and complained the day was so short.

His brother picked him up to carry him upstairs, saying, "Well! *I* can't make the day longer, you know."

"But God can," urged Bertie.

"I want *you* to carry me up," he said, wriggling out of his brother's arms, and throwing himself on Joan.

"Oh, no!" said Edward, "you're much too big and heavy."

"Oh, do let me," said Joan.

The touch of Bertie's caressing arms was such

joy to her. She could not explain the happiness the fancy he had taken to her seemed to give her.

So she wound her arms lovingly round him, and carried him up, the little fellow giving her a quiet kiss every now and then, and patting her face with his fat little hands.

"I believe you think I'm a little girl," she said, smiling down upon him.

"So you are, a kind of big little girl," he answered; "you're not quite a lady."

"Not quite a lady!" repeated Joan.

"No, not quite. You're a sort of 'playing lady,' you know. Have you got a mamma?"

"No," said Joan, softly.

"No mamma," he exclaimed; "did you *never* have one?"

A look of great pain passed over the girl's face, and her forlorn heart answered, "Never!"

"Is she quite dead?" said Bertie, in an awe-struck whisper.

Joan bowed her head.

"I wish she hadn't died, poor thing!" said the tender-hearted child, half crying.

Joan, remembering his grief of yesterday, and the way he had then been consoled, whispered that everyone was much happier in heaven.

Bertie seemed comforted, but thoughtful.

"It was a long way to go," he said, looking up to the skylight over the staircase, "all the way to the sky. Did she go by the wailwoad?"

"How silly you are, Bertie," said the superior Marion, who was following close behind, "don't you know that angels come and carry us to heaven?"

"Puppose they should drop us!" said Bertie; but Marion treated the remark with the contempt she considered it deserved.

"If *I* were in heaven," said the little boy, addressing himself again to Joan, "I would like *sometimes* to come down and see mamma. Do you think God would let me? I could, you know," he went on meditatively, "give God the direction, Ainsbro' Park,—Langdale,—Yorkshire."

"You'd be too happy to want to come," said Joan, softly.

"Would God read me 'Mamma's Bible Stories'?" was the next question. "Does He read them to hisself of a Sunday evening, do you think?"

And as Joan hesitated, he added eagerly, "He does *everything*, you know!"

Happily for Joan, the arrival at the nursery door took away the necessity of providing an answer.

She deposited her little burden on the floor, and kissing him fondly, wished him good night.

"Well, Edward," said Lady Ainsbro' to her son that evening, "and how are you getting on with Lady Joan?"

Edward Manners smiled, and slightly shook his head.

"She is much more in love with little Bertie than ever she will be with me!" he answered.

"My dear boy!" exclaimed his mother, "you cannot expect everything to come in a day. Why, how long have you known her? You really mustn't be so downhearted. Faint heart never won fair lady."

"I am not downhearted, mother," answered the young man. "Lady Joan and I are great friends.

I only mean that she will never care for me in that way. I am quite sure of that."

"Tell me why," said Lady Ainsbro'.

"Because," he answered ("but this is quite between you and I, and must not go any further"), "because I have a shrewd suspicion that she is in love with somebody else."

"Impossible!" exclaimed his mother, "the girl has been immured all her life at Seaforth, like a nun in a convent. She has never seen anyone since she grew up. Who *could* she be in love with?"

"Ah! well," said Edward Manners, "I may be mistaken, and I can't undertake to mention names. But you mark my words, mother, Lady Joan will never be in love with *me!*"

CHAPTER IV.

The Assizes.

"We can offer you something in the shape of dissipation, to-day," said Lord Ainsbro' to Joan, at breakfast. "The assizes are going on at York, and if you would care to go, Lady Ainsbro' and my son will be delighted to take you. I wish I could go myself, but it is one of my busy days at home."

Joan expressed her readiness; and Lord Ainsbro' added, "It is very interesting sometimes, and I believe there are one or two important cases to be tried this year."

Soon after breakfast, therefore, the party started, and reached York in about an hour.

They were given some seats not far from the judge, and Joan was placed with Edward Manners on one side, and Lady Ainsbro' on the other.

A case was going on when they entered; and soon after they had settled themselves, the counsel

for the defence rose, and addressed the jury on behalf of his client. But he had not proceeded far, before a strange and bewildering feeling came over little Joan.

As music, without our actually listening to it, note for note, brings over us a rush of thoughts and associations, so did the voice and the words which now fell upon her ear affect her. Something they recalled to her—some memory, she knew not what.

Colourless she sat, with her lips apart, wondering what it could be. Somewhere, surely, sometime, she had looked down upon some such scene, and been swayed by the rush of words like these. Some time or other, sitting entranced and excited, she had been carried away on the wings of like intense and forcible language, while her ear had been charmed by the like beauty of intonation!

In vain she strove to catch that faint memory, that something lying in the past, of which she was being now reminded. She strained after it with all her might, without knowing what it was she was trying to remember; but with a strong conviction

that, could it only become clear to her, it would bring some great joy in its train. Sometimes, she thought she had caught hold of it; but it seemed always to slip away again, and to elude her grasp.

Gazing down upon the upturned faces, and seeing in their expressions how the speaker swayed them at his will, came the memory of other upturned faces, swayed in like manner too.

Something told her that with the applause which would follow the close of the speech, all would become clear in her mind.

The speaker was drawing to an end of his defence in a forcible peroration; and she forced herself to listen to the grand though simple language which was falling on her ear.

He ceased rather suddenly; but his words, powerful and pleading, rang in her ear still.

An irrepressible murmur of admiration sounded through the court.

That was not the murmur she had expected. What was it she had thought to hear?

Echoing back from the years that were gone, it came suddenly to her that what she had expected

was, "Bravo! Mr. Seaforth!" "Three cheers for Mr. Seaforth!" and in an instant all was clear to her.

Yes! It was Godfrey!

It was Godfrey himself who, in the disguising wig and gown, was down there in front of her.

As in a dream she heard the voices round her commenting on the speaking, and asking the young barrister's name. And as in a dream, when Lady Ainsbro' leant across her to beg her son to go and find out who he was, Joan turned to her very quietly, and said, "There is no need to ask, I can tell you. It is Godfrey—Godfrey Seaforth!"

. . . . .

The crowd at the doors was very great at the end of the day, when everyone dispersed.

The Ainsbro' carriage was got up with some difficulty. Joan was hardly conscious of the crowd, hardly conscious of anything as she passed along on the arm of Edward Manners, and got into the carriage.

But as she drove away, she suddenly sat up with a start, and leaning forward eagerly, gazed out of

the carriage window, at the same moment almost involuntarily putting up her little white handkerchief.

The young barrister, who, still wearing his wig and gown, was leaning against the door, watching the crowds disperse, started violently also. He threw up his hands, and started forward, but restrained himself, with an evident effort, from the impulse to follow the carriage.

Instead, he went up to one of the *employés*, and pointing to it made some inquiries.

Then, hastily stepping out into the street, he strained his longing gaze after it, until it was quite out of sight.

CHAPTER V.

The Daisies' Mistake.

JOAN woke the morning after the assizes to the vague feeling that something joyful had occurred, and that something disagreeable was pending. The first recollection soon returned in a tumult of tremulous excitement, quickly followed by the second; by the cold blank feeling that her visit to Ainsbro' was concluded, and that she was to return to Seaforth to-day.

On descending to breakfast, she was greeted with the news that her father's horses had met with a slight accident on the way, and that they could not possibly do the long drive till they had had a day and a night's rest. One of them was a little lame. Joan must therefore positively remain at Ainsbro' till to-morrow, and a telegram to that effect was to be dispatched to Lord Seaforth at once.

To Joan the respite was like the answer to a prayer.

To remain in Godfrey's near vicinity another twenty-four hours! To have the wild hope still that somehow or other he may try to see her; it was almost too good to be true.

"It was most unfortunate," said Lady Ainsbro', regretfully, "that she and her husband and son should be engaged to a shooting-party which could not be postponed; but Joan should be put under the charge of the children, who would prevent her feeling dull."

Lord and Lady Ainsbro' and Mr. Manners took a very kind leave of Joan, and Lady Ainsbro' said she hoped she would make what use she liked of the children as companions. She might keep them to sit with her at dinner, and do just as she liked with them.

Joan felt very thankful for this permission as the hours wore on. She was so restless and excited that she could not bear to be alone, and she could not read, or occupy herself in any way. The children's unconscious conversation was the greatest

relief to her, and helped her to get through the day.

She found herself starting at every sound: at the ringing of every bell, the opening or shutting of every door, the sound in the road of any passing vehicle, or the footstep of anyone in the garden.

Towards evening these excited feelings settled down into deep blank disappointment.

Hope ebbed away, and when the sound of the dressing-gong told her night had really come, it left her altogether. She felt now the only thing was to put these thoughts away entirely, and resolutely to turn her mind to something else.

She therefore told the children they might sit up to dinner with her. She could not bear to let them go out of her sight for an instant.

Marion and Bertie were delighted with this arrangement, and hurried into the dining-room to make sure places had been laid for them. Joan soon found her attention was likely to be directed from her own affairs. They sat at dinner, one on each side of her, discoursing on various subjects

connected with the nurses and household, in the presence of three men-servants. The first piece of news was that Nana was soon going for a holiday to see her mother. Joan, whose ideas of nurses were a great deal formed by the mention of one in "Home they brought her warrior dead," asked if Nana's mother was not a very old woman.

But here she found she was quite mistaken. Nana's mother, she discovered from Bertie's answer, was not at all old; in fact, she was not as old as Nana; or, at most, there was only a difference of two years between them.

The conversation next turned upon hair-dressing. Bertie patted and smoothed Joan's hair, and said how soft and curly it was; while Marion made a minute examination of the thick plaits at the back. Then she came round to Joan's side, just as the butler was in the act of pouring out some claret, and said earnestly, gazing up into her face, "When you take down your hair at night, does it come *right* off, like mamma's, or does it stick to your head, like mine?"

There was a few minutes' pause after this ques-

tion had been answered, and then Marion asked Joan if she was tired.

"No, darling," answered Joan, "why?"

"Oh, only because mamma said you were like Mrs. Jones, our new housekeeper, so I thought you might be," was the inconsequent answer.

"Am I like the housekeeper?" asked Joan, rather puzzled.

"Only not near so fat," put in Bertie, who was busy patting the salt.

"No, of course not," answered Marion. "I mean you are like her because you are not used to children, mamma said, and might get tired of us, so that we were not to bother you *too* much. So you are like Mrs. Jones, ain't you?"

"Is she not used to children?" said Joan, for the sake of saying something.

"No," answered Marion, "and when we wanted to go and cook, she said she couldn't be bothered. *We* thought she was cross, but mamma said it was only because she was not used to children. Of course, if she'd been born with children," added Marion, "it would have been different."

After this, other subjects were introduced of more or less interest.

"Papa and mamma," said Bertie, "were talking such funny things about you before you came down to breakfast. If I could remember the words I would tell you all about it. They stopped directly you came in."

The children were now fetched to bed, and Joan, at their earnest request, attended their *couché*.

The following quarrel took place between them as they undressed:—

"Marion! Marion! you have upset my shoes and socks off the chair!"

"No, I didn't, Bertie."

"But you *did*, Marion, I saw you."

"I wish you wouldn't tell stories, Bertie."

"But I *saw* you, Marion."

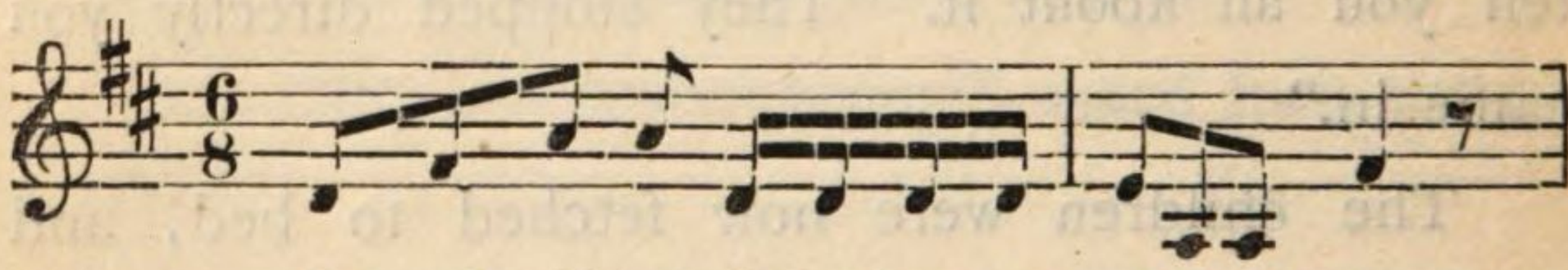
"Well, never mind, Bertie."

"But it *does* mind!"

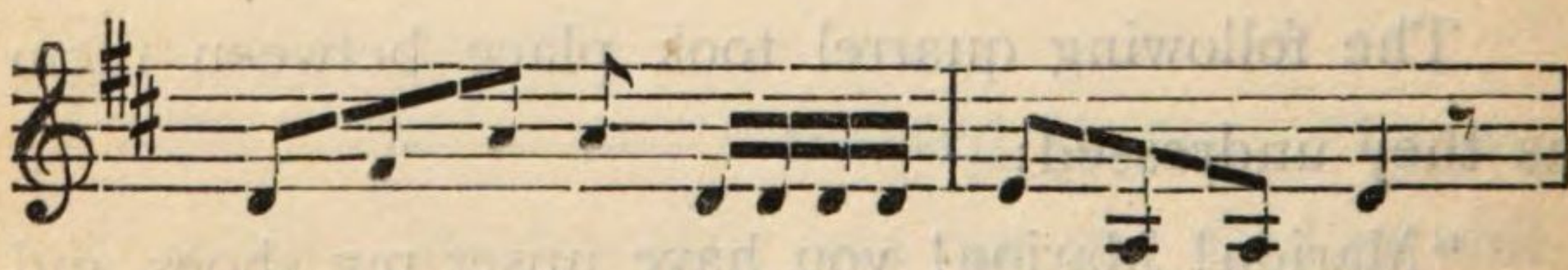
A slight pause, and then Bertie said, "Marion's telling a lie."

"Well, you're not my mistress," Marion finished off pompously.

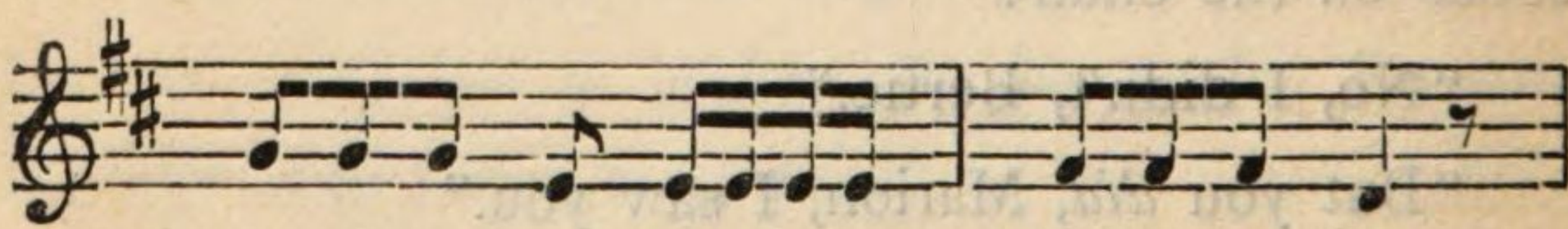
To divert their thoughts, Joan began to sing to them. She sang the old-fashioned ditties her nurse had years and years ago sung to her; and six times over at least was she called upon for the prime favourite, which they had never heard before.



Lavenders' blue, little finger, rosemary's green.

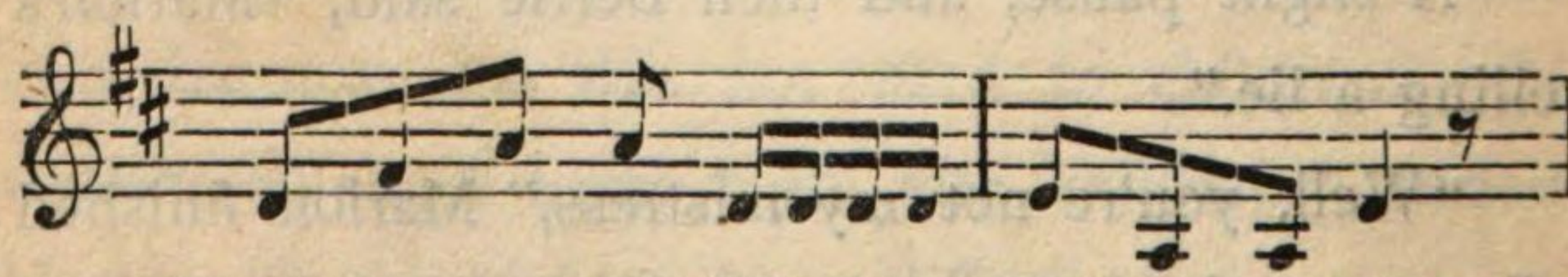


When I am king, little finger, you shall be queen.



Who told you so, thumby, thumby? who told you so?

'Twas mine own heart, little finger, that told me so.



'Twas my own heart, little finger, that told me so.

II.

When you are dead, little finger,
As it may hap,
You shall be buried, little finger,
Under the tap.

III.

For why? For why? thumby,
Thumby, for why?
That you may drink, little finger,
When you are dry.

"May we say our prayers to you, to-night?" asked Marion, when the entertainment was over, and the nurse said it was time for the children to be in bed.

And before Joan could assent or dissent, her breath was almost taken away by the promptitude with which first one and then the other knelt down and plunged into, "Pray, God, bless papa and mamma, brothers and sisters, and all kind friends. Amen."

"*You're* kind friends, you know," said Bertie, coaxingly, "and nurse says you'll perhaps be our sister some day. Do you think you will?"

"I hope so," said Marion, "don't you?" And

without waiting for an answer they both scampered away into the bedroom nursery.

Joan felt rather startled, and when she got to her own room, she sat thinking over the children's words. And her vague thoughts resolved themselves into two of some distinctness. First, that she must never come to Ainsbro' Park again; and secondly, that if ever she had children of her own, she should like just such another little pair as Marion and Bertie.

The next morning, as the carriage was not ordered till one, Joan yielded to the children's entreaties that she would take one last walk with them, and come into the fields to get blackberries.

It was a lovely autumn day, the children were in high spirits, and for a time Joan joined in their occupation, and helped to reach the blackberries which were too high for them.

But a feeling of heart-sickness and weariness came over her, and she sat down under a tree to rest.

The children brought her hedge daisies and

other treasures, and then returned to the blackberries once more.

Her sad thoughts returned upon her, and she had no power to drive them away.

And so it was too true! She was forgotten.

Other interests had come into his life, and she was nothing to him any more.

It was all very natural, *most* natural. It had been only compassion, such compassion as any noble-minded man would have felt for a lonely and neglected child.

It was all very different now. She was a woman now, and he a man with other aims and objects, and a new and different life.

But child or woman, he is the one idol of Joan's life, and as she sits there musing, she knows it all too well. Oh, why had she put up her handkerchief as a signal! A burning blush rose to her cheek at the recollection, and, dying away, left her paler than before, while blank desolation settled down upon her lonely, empty heart.

Lonely, lonely, more lonely than ever!

The children's voices grew faint in the distance

as they wandered further and further away; the quiet autumn stillness around her seemed to reflect the blank silence of her life. There was a step on the dead leaves behind her—and Godfrey was standing at her side!

Godfrey, holding out his hands to her with the old familiar smile:

"At last!" he said, "at last little Joan!"

A sense of overpowering shyness came over her. She felt as if he must read her very thoughts, and she turned away her head and did not answer.

"Am I quite forgotten?" he said sadly.

She could not resist the yearning in his voice. Slowly she turned her dark eyes upon him, but they dropped beneath his gaze. She was afraid to let him see them lest he should read in their depths all that she was trying to conceal.

He stooped down and picked up some of the big hedge daisies the children had left lying at her feet.

Pulling off their petals one by one, he repeated to himself the childish rhyme:

"M'aimes-tu?

"Un peu?

"Beaucoup?

"Passionnément?

"Point du tout?"

It came in two cases to "Point du tout."

Godfrey threw the daisies down again, saying, as he did so, "Lie there, faithless daisies. As untrue to your old answers as Joan is untrue to hers. It is all so long ago that I am quite forgotten, and Joan does not love her elder brother any more!"

Joan watched him as he did all this, and the old scenes of her childhood rose before her. The meadows disappeared, and she was standing again on the grass-plot by the fish-ponds.

It seemed easier now to connect the rising lawyer with the Godfrey of her childhood—the hero of her girlish dreams.

The old answer rose to her lips as his reproachful words fell upon her ear.

Almost unconsciously, she turned to him, and whispered, "I think the daisies must have made a mistake, Godfrey, for I know I *do!*"

CHAPTER VI.

Divided.

"And you are still little Joan," he said softly, looking at her intently after the first burst of questions and answers had passed between them; "very little changed. Still the little Joan I found in the picture-gallery nearly eight years ago. But," he added anxiously, "a happier little Joan, I hope. Not quite the sad and lonely child I found there then?"

"Just the same," she answered, "no happier; just as sad, and much more lonely."

A look of great pain passed over his face.

"I had so hoped," he said, "that changes in circumstances might have wrought a change, and brought you and your father closer together."

She shook her head.

"Is it his fault entirely?" he asked, looking at her searchingly.

She shook her head again. "How can I love anyone who wrongs you so cruelly?"

The words burst from her before she could stop them.

"Is it really so?" he said; and something in his eyes, like a delight he seemed in vain to try to conceal, came for a moment and was gone directly. "Do you still believe in me as much as that? —— but why," he added, hastily interrupting himself, "why do you say *more* lonely? What could be sadder or more lonely than the state in which I found you?"

"Because," she cried, "to have had so much, and to have lost it, is worse than never to have had anything at all. Because when I returned to the darkness and the loneliness in which you found me, I found it all the darker for having known what the light could be. Because when *you* left me you took all that *made* my life with you, and without you, *life* it has not been; only a slow bearing of existence from day to day. I always told you I could not live without you. Oh, Godfrey! why did you go?"

"Yet, some say," he answered gently, without apparently noticing her last words, "some say the memory of bygone happiness is a blessing beyond price; a possession which is theirs for ever, which none can take away."

"*I* do not think so!" she exclaimed; "the contrast between the brightness of the past and the darkness of the present increases the pain tenfold. I endured my lonely childhood because I knew no better; but this blank, lonely girlhood, this present with no future, this life with no love—I *cannot* bear it, Godfrey. It is killing me day by day. And the past was so sunny; our life of love and sympathy so fair!"

He was deeply moved, and turned his head away with a bitter sigh. "And I," he said mournfully, "I, who vowed myself, under the picture, to care for you, and to make up to you for all you had suffered, I can do nothing to help you—nothing! Fate is dealing very sternly with us, little Joan."

"Godfrey!" she cried, "what is the mystery that is lying on your life? Tell me your secret, and let

me bear with you all the sorrow and the trouble it entails upon you. Tell me."

She waited, breathless, as if life and death hung upon his answer.

He turned his head away again, and his eye sought the pure blue sky above, so often his refuge and solace in the dark hours of his trouble, and his face grew visibly paler. Oh, God! the temptation was terrible!

"Yes," urged one voice within him, "tell her. Let her help you to bear your life. It is for her happiness as well as for your own. Tell her."

"What!" said another voice, "lay such a burden on this young girl! Soil the whiteness of her pure young hands with your guilty secret!"

Very sadly he looked down upon her, as he answered in hardly audible tones, "*I cannot.*"

Mournfully the summer breezes seemed to wail and whisper round them; the wind in the fir-trees caught up the accents and echoed, "I cannot."

"You do not really love me as you used," she said, weeping, "or you would trust me more. Young

as I was, there were then no secrets between us, and now——"

He looked at her wistfully, almost reproachfully, as he answered, in words they had so often in the old days read together—

> Yet this inconstancy is such
> As you too shall adore;
> I could not love thee, dear, so much,
> Loved I not honour more.

A sudden light broke all over her face, and was reflected for a moment on his. Then, as if alarmed at the admission he was making, his face grew grave and sad again, and the light died away.

"Between you and me, little Joan," he said in a dreary, far-away voice, "there is a great gulf fixed. On our sad young lives the word is written—divided! I can link no life to mine; ask none to share my name. Yet, I am not like you. I would not part with the memory of our happy days together. To me it is all-in-all!"

"And must it always be like this?" she asked; "must we live on a memory for ever? Is there no

future for us, and to our sorrow and separation is there to be *no* end?"

"I see no end as yet," he answered. "God help us!"

"But we are so young," she cried, "and life stretches before us so long and so drearily. How shall we face our lives? How shall we bear to be divided? we who, though so unwanted by others, are all-in-all to each other?"

"Oh, Joan!" he said, "little Joan, is it really so? Am I really all-in-all to you still?"

He spoke with a kind of despair, with which a secret joy and pride struggled.

"Surely," she answered simply; "who have I ever had in my world but you? and without you my world is empty indeed."

He half put out his hand as if to stop her as she spoke, but the look of pleasure crept into his eyes again, and this time it did not go directly.

Passionate words of love and devotion rose to his lips, but he forced them back, and clenched his hands firmly together.

"And you?" she said timidly, pained by his

manner, "do you not love me still? Am I not all-in-all to you too?"

"God help me!" he groaned; "you are the day-star of my life, little Joan."

"Then, Godfrey," she said, holding out her hands to him, "do not leave me any more. Think of the life to which I shall this day return! Am I loved? Am I wanted? Why should not we take our lives into our own hands. Take me with you. Let me share your troubles, and bear your burdens with you. Let me go where you go, live where you live, die where you die!"

She was looking at him with the trust and adoration of her childhood, with which the deeper love of riper years was merged and mingled.

He turned his head away, and covered his face with his hands.

Much had he borne in the dark and lonely path to which he had vowed himself, and the strength of his purpose had carried him through.

More would he bear, if bear he must; but when it came to see another suffer—oh, God! it was hard —hard.

So easy, in comparison, was it to bear trouble for himself; but to bear it for her! What was he to do? What was he to say? What could be done to help her?

He cast his thoughts back to her childhood, to see if he could glean or strength or counsel from the past; some memory of his dealings with the *child* in her troubles wherewith to help the woman in this her hour of trial.

Down the long gallery he sees her again receding, bright, brave, and smiling still; bearing herself so firm and bravely that he may not weaken or fail. He recalls once again, with a yearning love and pity, the light, childish step that strove so hard not to falter, the proud and queenly bearing of the now drooping little head.

Could he only touch that chord again; once more awaken those noble feelings which had carried her so bravely through before; call up for a moment that martyr spirit that so readily and gladly sacrifices itself for the sake of the one it loves!

He turned suddenly to her, holding out both his hands. "Little Joan," he said imploringly, "you

must be my good angel still. You must help and not hinder me in my difficult life. Otherwise no blessing can rest upon our affection; it will be idolatry, not love. You must be the day-star of my life, to whom I may turn for strength to go on in the hard path of duty. Say you will help me to be brave and patient, by being both yourself. Oh, say it for my sake, little Joan!"

He had struck the right chord at last. She was herself again directly; her true unselfish self—a brave, self-sacrificing woman, ready to lay any burden on herself, if by so doing she could ease him by a fragment of the load he bore.

She put her hands in his and whispered, "I will."

"God bless you for those words," he murmured, refreshed and strengthened, "they send me on my way. "Oh, Joan! little Joan! God knows, *you* know how gladly I would take you with me; but it may not be! Some day, perhaps; some day. Now wish me God-speed before I go."

. . . . .

The children came chattering back, with their baskets full of the nuts and black-berries they had

been gathering, to where Joan sat, as in a dream, feeling as if she had lived her life out since they went away.

"Have you been dull all alone?" said Bertie, anxiously. "Have we been too long away?"

The touch of his caressing little fingers and his coaxing accents were almost too much for the poor girl's overwrought feelings.

She hid her face in his curly hair to hide the tears which came into her eyes. "No, darling," she whispered, "I have not been dull."

But something in her voice made him suspicious, and he peeped anxiously under her hat.

"What's the matter *wiff* you?" he said; "let me see your face. I want you to look at me with your great big eyes."

Joan raised her head, and looked full at the little fellow with a smile.

"You've got such a pretty face!" exclaimed the child, struck with a sudden admiration. "I didn't never *know* before what a pretty face you'd got!'....

The light which is reflected straight from heaven was shining in the eyes of little Joan!

CHAPTER VII.

Mr. Waukenphast.

When Hester returned from Nice, on the evening of Colin's visit to the châlet, she met the three girls a little way from the house, and they all returned home together.

"Well! my darlings," she said as they walked along, "and what have you been doing all day? How did you get on without me?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Olive, "we have had such a happy day, mamma! You have no idea how pleasant it has been!"

"Why?" exclaimed Hester, surprised; "what has made it so pleasant?"

"We have had a visitor," said Olive, "and he has been sitting with us all day."

"A visitor!" exclaimed Hester. "Who? What do you mean?"

"Yes," said Olive, with sparkling eyes, "it was

a gentleman from Monaco; and we've had such a pleasant time!"

"A gentleman from Monaco!" repeated Hester, more and more bewildered; "has your father been home? Did he bring him?"

"Oh dear no!" said Olive, "he came quite by himself; and he *is* so nice, mother dear, it is a pity you missed him."

"But who is he?" inquired Hester, "and what brought him here? What is his name?"

"He is a Scotchman," said Olive, "and we call him Mr. Waukenphast."

"Waukenphast!" said Hester, "that is not a Scotch name. Oh, my dear children, you should not have made friends with a stranger when I was away. He may be a card-sharper from Monaco, or anything else."

"Oh! no, indeed, mother," said Olive, earnestly, "he has been saying what a wicked place Monaco is, and how he has been so dreadfully cheated himself that he's never going to play again. I am sure when you see him, you'll see in a minute he *couldn't*

be a card-sharper. His face is much too good and pleasant."

"When I see him!" repeated Hester, "Why! is he here still?"

"No! but he's coming again," said Olive. "We begged and prayed him to come again soon, and he promised he would. So you will see him, and I know you will like him."

Hester now turned to her eldest daughter, and succeeded in getting a rather more definite account from her of the day's proceedings.

But the circumstance only sent her to bed with a heavier heart than usual, and a deeper sense of her children's unprotected position, both in the present and in the future.

From that day she fancied she noticed a change in Olive. She seemed restless, and as if always in expectation of something.

She could not settle herself steadily to her usual occupations.

The days, however, passed on, and Mr. Waukenphast did not reappear.

But one morning, when Olive and her mother

were sitting together in the orange-grove, Olive's work suddenly dropped upon her lap, and her eyes became fixed on some distant object, while a beautiful blush overspread her face.

"What are you thinking about, Olly?" asked her mother, surprised at the change in the girl's face, and suddenly struck with her beauty.

"He is coming, mother!" said Olive softly. "Here he is!"

"Who?" said Hester, much puzzled, and she turned quickly round.

Colin was advancing hat in hand—the impersonation of bright, frank, English manhood.

Hester felt there was no doubting that the young man before her was a high-bred English gentleman.

She held out her hand with a smile.

"This is mamma," said Olive shyly, as he came up and shook hands.

"I am so sorry," he said, addressing himself to Olive, after a few respectful words of greeting to her mother, "I am so sorry I could not come before, but I have had some business to attend to, and could not get away."

"Business at Monaco!" exclaimed Olive; "I did not know there was any business at Monaco, I thought it was all play!"

"Ah! Miss Olive," said Colin, "unfortunately, play at Monaco is business to which what *we* call business is only play. *Their* play is indeed a terrible business. But my business has been at Nice, not Monaco!"

His brow clouded over as he spoke.

"And what has your business been *there?*" she asked, "not play, surely!"

"No!" he answered gravely, "I have been engaged in trying to bring an old fox to earth, and I mean to hunt him down, too."

"Him!" she said. "Who?"

"I don't know his name," he answered, "or care to; I know *him*, that's quite enough. These gamblers, Miss Olive, don't care to give their real names always, and——"

"My daughter," interrupted Hester hastily, and rather stiffly, "knows nothing about these things; you are talking Greek to her."

"I beg your pardon," said Colin directly, "I

ought not to run on like this. But I was just following the course of my own thoughts on a subject of which they are just now full, and I quite forgot who I was speaking to."

"Forgot who you were speaking to?" laughed Olive, "why you never knew, did you?"

"Yes!" he answered. "If you remember, when I was here before, you told me your name, and I said I should never forget it. And," he added, half to himself, "I never shall."

"Ah! yes, but only my Christian name," she said. "You don't know my surname. Now I don't know your Christian name, but I do know your surname. That's just the difference."

"*Do* you?" he said; "I do not remember telling it to you."

"Yes," answered Olive, "you are Mr. Waukenphast."

Colin laughed. "*You* said that was my name," he replied, "but *I* never did."

Hester here joined in.

"My daughter told me," she said, "that your name was Waukenphast, and I quite believed her.

At the same time she said you were Scotch, and I confess I ——"

"You thought I was an impostor," laughed Colin; "I don't wonder. No! Miss Olive," he said, turning to the young girl, "there is no clan Wauchenphast, but there *is* a clan Fraser, and to it I belong—

> Colin Fraser is my name,
> Scotland is my nation.
> The little glen's my dwelling place,
> A pleasant habitation.

"Or, rather," he added, "it ought to be. Unfortunately it is not. You must," he added, turning once more to Hester, who seemed suddenly lost in thought, "have wondered who your daughters' visitor could be!"

"I did, indeed!" she said, looking at him, but speaking as if her thoughts were far away.

"But now you know, mamma," said Olive.

"Yes!" said Hester, dreamily, and as if speaking to herself, "I hear. He is Colin Fraser; most extraordinary!"

"No!" put in Olive, "not yet; something extra-

ordinary some day, but only unpaid attaché as yet. But how did you guess that, mamma dear?"

Hester shook herself free from her thoughts, to wonder how she was ever to teach a daughter brought up in the mountains the manners of society.

"I don't wish to ask impertinent questions," said Colin, "but may I, in return for my own confidences, know the name of the lady to whom I am speaking; and who, as yet, I only know as Miss Olive's mother?"

"No!" said Hester, hurriedly, "not yet. Later on, perhaps, but for the present, I will only be Miss Olive's mother."

Colin bowed assent, but looked disappointed.

"Mr. Fraser," added Hester, "will you stay here the night, if your business at Nice is concluded? We can only offer you a very humble lodging, and very frugal fare; but such as it is you are welcome to it. And as to clothes, &c., my husband's wardrobe is very much at your disposal. He himself is away just now."

Colin accepted the invitation with great eagerness.

The arrival of Hessie and Venetia on the scenes then gave a fresh turn to the conversation, and the mother, after a time, left them all together, and went into the house to make a few preparations for the comfort of the guest, and as soon as she was gone, Colin and Olive strolled away together, and were seen no more.

When the hour of supper drew near, Hessie and Venice returned to the châlet, but the other two were wandering still.

And when they appeared, they were still talking gaily, as though they had not half finished all they had to say.

Colin will never forget that evening. After supper, they all sat out in the orange-grove, and the three sisters sang glees without accompaniment.

The moon shone through the olives, and to his mind it was the fairest scene he had ever beheld.

Fain would he it could have lasted longer; but

Hester broke up the party after a time, and seemed anxious to dismiss him to the smoking-room, and to send the girls to bed.

She took him there herself, and then went upstairs with her daughters.

But as soon as the lights were out in the house, and all was quiet, she came down again, and returned to the smoking-room, where Colin was sitting, wrapped in pleasant thoughts.

Closing the door carefully and softly behind her, she came forward, and said, that if he were not very tired, she should be glad to have some conversation with him.

Colin, whose thoughts were all on one subject, who could not that night conceive of any other, felt very nervous.

He was afraid the unpaid attaché was going to receive a dismissal at the hands of an anxious mother.

He placed a chair for her, and waited anxiously for her to begin.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Conversation in the Smoking-room.

BUT her first words changed the current of his thoughts entirely.

"Colin Fraser," she said sadly, "we ought not to be strangers to one another. Do you not know, have you not guessed, ere this, who we are?"

But Colin only looked bewildered.

"When I refused to give you my name to-day," she continued, "it was that I did not wish you in the presence of my daughters to discover what I perceived at once myself. Tell me, were you not brought up at Seaforth, and were you not for a time thrown there with Lord Seaforth's adopted son?"

"Godfrey Seaforth!" exclaimed Colin, starting from his seat, and a rush of thought coming over him; "what of Godfrey Seaforth? What have you to do with him?"

"Alas!" she said, "I am his mother!"

"His mother!" cried Colin, almost knocked over with astonishment; "Godfrey Seaforth's mother!"

But his next feeling was the overpowering shame and regret which he always felt in connection with that part of his life; the feeling that his own dead mother had, in all concerning Godfrey, been deeply to blame.

Surely Godfrey Seaforth's mother could not but be thinking so too!

But when he glanced at Hester, he saw that no feelings of that sort were at work in her mind. Her attitude was one of deep dejection, and her eyes expressed nothing but pitiful entreaty.

"My boy!" she said in a broken voice, "what of him? Tell me something about him. Has anything been heard? Is anything known?"

Colin shook his head mournfully.

"I know nothing about him, Mrs. Seaforth—nothing."

She turned away, deeply disappointed.

"But you can, perhaps, throw some light upon the past," she said eagerly. "*Anything* you can tell

me of his life at Seaforth will be a revelation to me; and may help me to understand the present. Tell me anything you can remember."

Poor Colin! It was a trying request, and a hard task, to go over the past with Godfrey's mother, retracing passages he would so gladly forget in the life of his own!

He screened her in his recital as well as he could; but he could not help letting Hester see that he did not hold her entirely blameless.

"She is dead, is she not?" said Hester softly.

"Alas! poor mother!" he answered, "she pined away and died. Hers was a difficult nature, and its pride could not brook mortification. She could not survive failure and banishment. But she repented bitterly, Mrs. Seaforth," he went on earnestly. "She told me and my brother on her death-bed that had she that part of her life to live over again, she would act very differently. She charged us both, if ever we met Godfrey Seaforth again, to tell him so, and to beg him to forgive her for her conduct towards him. But one thing," he added hesitatingly, "one thing I must say. I do not think any word or

act of hers had anything to do with Lord Seaforth's alienation from his nephew. That was altogether a separate matter. All that is wrapped in mystery, which will, I fancy sometimes, never be revealed till the Judgment Day. I have, however, my own ideas about it." Hester caught eagerly at his words, and begged him to tell her what those ideas were. Colin looked terribly confused. He blushed scarlet, and answered hurriedly, "Oh, no! indeed I cannot. Pray do not ask me. I entirely forgot who I was speaking to."

She looked searchingly at him for a moment, and said quietly, though with deep sadness, "Do not fear offending me. Say on. It will be kinder in the end. Do not mind me. Look upon me only as Godfrey's mother, and speak without a thought of anyone else."

"If it is your desire," he said, but he looked away from her as he spoke, "I will. I have always fancied he had fallen into the hands of, and been led away by—his father!"

There was a silence, and he was afraid that after all she was hurt and angry.

But she was only thinking deeply. "It could not be," she said at last; "it could not be without my knowing it. No! he has never been near his father nor me. He has held no communication of any sort with us. He has not written a line to me for many, many years."

"Then what is your idea about him?" asked Colin. "How do you account for his conduct?"

"I will tell you," she answered, with a deep sigh; "I feel I can trust you, and that you will understand."

She then, to begin with, confided to him all her old fears and scruples about the way in which Godfrey had been brought up, with which the reader is acquainted; keeping as much in the background as possible his father's share in the matter.

"Think," she went on, "of the almost primeval life he led here, and then think of his sudden introduction into English life. Look at his sisters. You see its effect upon them. They are like children in their ignorance of the world. And he was taken away from here and suddenly plunged into English life, with an independent fortune in the

present, and heir to thousands in the future. His uncle had no hold over him. He deeply resented his conduct in the matter of disinheriting his father, and so he neither liked nor respected him. How do I know into what bad hands he may have fallen, into what a life of reckless expenditure he, with no idea of the value of money, may have been led? But still, in spite of all this, I should not have felt so hopeless if it had not been for his refusing to meet me, for his taking flight from me. That is really why my heart misgives me so. That is why I feel he must know himself to be deeply to blame. He shrank from seeing me. He would not meet me face to face. Me! his mother!"

And she covered her face with her hands. "Then the long unbroken silence of all these years since," she went on, a few minutes after, "there is to my mind another sad proof of his guilt. Why should he mistrust my love and hide from me like this! He must have changed very much, or else entirely forgotten, if he can think me so unforgiving. What sin could he commit that I would not freely forgive? What sorrow could the knowledge of his wrong-

doing bring me that could be so hard to bear as this blank, cold silence, this never-ending suspense and uncertainty? Oh! if I only knew where he was! If I could only write to him, and assure him of my forgiveness, and beg him to come back to me! I still feel that if I could only meet him, only look into his eyes for a moment, I could make him tell me all. But I have never been able to do anything to find him. I have never had anyone to whom I could turn for help."

She paused for a moment, and then went on more calmly. "When I discovered who you were to-day, my first thought was you would be able to tell me something. It seems you cannot; but at least you can help me to find out. Oh, Mr. Fraser! find him for me, I implore you! Tell him all I have said. Or, if you cannot go to England yourself, have you no friend who would try and find out *something* about him; find out, at least, whether he is dead or alive?"

"Mrs. Seaforth," answered Colin, deeply moved, "I cannot tell you how thankful, how grateful I should be, if I could be the means of helping you;

if, in God's mercy, I might in any way lessen the trouble by which you and yours have been overwhelmed. That my family should be associated in your mind with other thoughts than those with which I feel you must regard it, would be a joy to me which I can hardly describe to you. I would start off to England this very night if I could; but, alas! I am not my own master. Do not, however," he added quickly, seeing her face fall with disappointment, "do not despair. Much can be done by writing, and I can trust my brother to do all that I would do myself. He is a curate in Warwickshire, but I know he will go to London directly on such an errand as this, and put himself in communication with the necessary authorities, and do all he can to find out something about your son. I will write now directly, and say exactly what you wish, so that my brother's answer may reach me before the ambassador carries me back to Berlin. After that, Andrew had better correspond directly with you."

"God bless you, Mr. Fraser," she exclaimed, suddenly filled with hope. "May God bless and reward you. I can never tell you what it is to me. I have

longed day and night for an opportunity of enlisting someone's sympathy and assistance, but all hope of it was fast dying away. It is indeed marvellous that you, of all people, should have been sent to my help. It seems almost like a miracle. God-sent you are, you must be. I wish I knew how to repay you for your kindness."

"You can," suddenly exclaimed Colin, impetuously, "you can repay me a thousandfold; you can give me the hope of a reward out of all proportion to the poor services I am rendering you!"

"Can I?" she said wondering. "How?"

"Can you not guess?" exclaimed Colin.

"No," she said; "what can it be? Tell me."

"The hope," he answered, "that you will one day give me your daughter for my own!"

"My daughter!" she repeated, "which daughter?"

"Your daughter Olive," he answered.

"Olive!" she exclaimed. "Little Olly! Why Olive is a mere child!"

"Time will cure that," he said eagerly, "and I am only asking you to give me the hope of it, when

I have risen in my profession, and can offer her a home."

"Have you spoken to her?" she asked hastily.

And, on Colin's earnestly answering in the negative, she added, imploringly—

"Do not speak to her yet! She is so young, so inexperienced. Wait a little longer. And indeed, even as far as *I* am concerned, you must not expect an answer to-night. I am so taken by surprise, so bewildered. Let me sleep upon it, and give you an answer to-morrow."

So saying, she wished Colin a kind good-night; and sought her pillow with a vague kind of undefined feeling that the future did not look quite so hopeless as usual, and that there was a glimmer of light on the darkness of her way.

For, if one child's future was settled, and in safe hands, there would be a refuge for the others, when those dark days came which were still ever-present to her mind.

CHAPTER IX.

Mutual Recognitions.

DOWNWARDS, ever downwards, had been Godfrey Seaforth the elder's career. Gradually he had passed the narrow boundary line that divides honour from dishonour, truth from falsehood.

Lost now to all sense of principle he stooped habitually to get by foul means what he could not always obtain by fair.

He had of late years frequented Nice more than Monaco, and it was here that he was the terror of the club, though as yet he was not definitely suspected. Vague rumours were heard sometimes as to the secret of his extraordinary and persistent luck; but they died away without any results; for no one could bring home to him their vague suspicions.

Intense was the excitement of the life Godfrey led.

At first, he had been in daily and hourly dread of detection, but he had got accustomed to the feeling now; and as he had never been in any danger of being discovered, he had got hardened in his evil course, and had lost the fear of exposure.

But soon after the arrival of the English ambassador from Berlin, he began to have an uneasy feeling with regard to a young Englishman, who, at about the same time, appeared at the club. He was a tall, fair, good-looking young man. At first he had been willing enough to become one of Godfrey's victims. But he now never played. All the same, he continued to frequent the club, and Godfrey had an uncomfortable consciousness that he was often hovering near him, and it suddenly occurred to him that the young man was watching his play.

As this dawned upon him more forcibly, he grew alarmed; and made up his mind to play fairly for a time, to disarm suspicion.

But the consequence of this manœuvre was that he lost heavily.

Terrified at this result, he resolved to win back some part of his money in his accustomed manner,

and then to go home for a while till this young spy should have disappeared. He ascertained that he was one of the attachés belonging to the Embassy, and he also ascertained that the ambassador's visit to Nice was drawing to a close, so that the club would only be for a week or so longer infested by this young and observant Englishman.

Godfrey was very little at the châlet now. His home was not to him what it had been in the days when we first found him in the orange-grove, playing with his little daughters. He did not care for them as he used.

The girls were growing up, and he was often made to feel that they were sufferers through him, as he had felt long ago in his son's case. He knew Hester thought so, he could not help feeling it himself; and anyone who caused him twinges of conscience was apt to become distasteful to him.

His life of hidden dishonesty, too, made him feel them far above him, and the incessant excitement in which he lived made the pure pleasures of his home insipid.

But a deeper reason was that he could never

look his wife in the face now. He had so much on his conscience which he kept concealed from her, and he knew well how she would shrink from him, did she know all.

And, hardened as Godfrey was, he could not bear the thought of this even now. He could not bear the idea of her despising him, and holding him in contempt.

His old love and admiration of her and of her goodness was strong in him as ever. He dared not meet the glance of her pure eyes; or contrast her blameless life with the pit of iniquity in which he felt himself to be irretrievably sunk.

That she had some vague suspicion in connection with his play he felt almost sure, for whenever he had returned home with large sums, she had invariably refused to make use of any part of them.

She would never touch a penny of the money. Her own and her girls' personal expenses and those of the household she managed entirely on the share of the allowance apportioned to her use; and that, she declared, was sufficient.

So, as we said just now, Godfrey's visits to the

châlet were few and far between. He had not been there for at least three weeks, when the resolution to which he had come, with regard to the importance of being absent from the club for a little while, made him suddenly leave Nice, and take his way home.

. . . . . .

The morning after Hester's interview with Colin when they all met at breakfast, she watched Olive narrowly, and she fancied there was a shyness and a tremulousness in her manner to Colin, which she had never seen her show to anyone else. She found herself wondering whether the child had already, and in so short a time, surrendered her young affections.

Her reverie was broken by the sound of hasty footsteps in the garden. They ascended the steps of the balcony, and someone entered the room by the window.

"Papa!" cried the girls.

"How are you all?" said a voice that Colin thought he knew, and he looked round.

As the new-comer's eye met those of the young

man who was sitting so happily with his wife and daughters, he started as if he had seen a ghost. He turned white to the very lips, and clinging tightly for support to the back of the chair nearest him, he breathed hard and fast, uttering something between a curse and an exclamation.

And at the same moment there burst upon Colin the appalling conviction that the gambler at Nice and Godfrey Seaforth were one and the same person, and that the man he was seeking to destroy was Olive's father!

CHAPTER X.

What does it all mean?

GODFREY SEAFORTH was the first to recover himself. He put on his most civil and cordial manner, and advancing to the young man as if he had never seen him before, he bade him welcome to his poor châlet, and declared with great warmth that any friend of his wife and daughters must be his friend too.

Colin received these overtures as calmly as he could, but he was so overcome by the discovery he had made that he could only find voice to express his thanks in a confused and incoherent manner.

Godfrey then turned to his daughters, and told them to entertain their guest by showing him the surrounding country, and specially mentioned a certain view to which he wished them to conduct him, and which was at some distance.

As soon as the door had closed upon the three

girls and Colin, Godfrey's manner changed. He looked nervous and confused, he offered his wife no explanation of what had taken place. His chief object seemed to be to avoid meeting her eye.

"I am very tired, Hester," he said, in an odd, confused way. "I shall go and lie down in the smoking-room, and try to sleep. Will you see that no one comes there to disturb me for the next two or three hours."

So saying, he left the room, closing the door after him. But he did not remain in the smoking-room an instant. He went out by a back-door, and crept stealthily along till his footsteps could not be heard by his wife as she sat by the window in the drawing-room.

Then he set off running as hard as he could back to the station, which he reached just in time to throw himself hot and exhausted into the train. And, an hour after, while Hester was imagining him to be asleep in the smoking-room, he was sitting in his usual place in the club at Nice, taking advantage of Colin's absence to recover the money he had lost in his usual unprincipled manner.

Now the mistake that Godfrey made was in supposing Colin to be the only one who was concerned in trying to detect his evil practices.

There were several others, and he was in fact the victim of a plot which only his sudden change of tactics had for a time caused to fall to the ground. Colin's temporary absence from Nice, therefore, made no real difference to the danger he was in of being detected.

He went thus unconscious and unarmed straight into the jaws of the enemy; and, as he sat playing, secure in the feeling that the young spy was miles away, he was in momentary danger of exposure, surrounded on all sides by those who were ready and waiting to bring his double-dealings to light.

Meanwhile, Hester, alarmed beyond measure at her husband's manner and conduct, sat where he had left her, trying to think it out. That something dreadful was going on she felt sure. Her husband's dismay at seeing Colin convinced her that such was the case, and also the effect which his appearance had had upon Colin himself.

Godfrey's evident fear of the young man, his

anxiety to be civil to him, and to make him remain at the châlet, filled her with misgiving.

What could it all mean! There came back to her, too, with a cold pang, the recollection of Colin's words to Olive as to the business which had detained him, and his intention of unearthing a plot, or words to that effect.

Could it be—oh, horrible thought! that her husband had fallen so low as to——? and that Colin was one of his victims?

She shuddered and turned cold.

Slow lingering steps now came on to the balcony, and paused at the drawing-room window.

Hester looked up, and saw Olive standing there in an attitude which expressed utter dejection, and with all the radiancy gone out of her face.

"What is the matter, darling?" she inquired anxiously.

Olive's pride struggled for a moment with her wounded feelings. She tried to say "Nothing," but it would not do.

"He has gone!" she said, in a faltering voice.

"He!" exclaimed Hester. "Who? Not Colin Fraser, surely!"

Her thoughts for the moment were all of her husband, and she was terrified for his sake.

Olive bowed her head, she could not steady her voice to speak.

"Where has he gone?" exclaimed Hester; "what did he say?"

"Oh, mother," answered Olive, "he said nothing! He gave no reason at all. He suddenly said he *must* catch the train to Nice, and he rushed off without saying good-bye, or telling me when he would come back again."

Hester looked pityingly at the poor girl's quivering lips and glistening eyes, and murmured to herself, "Poor Olive! Poor little Olly!" For it was clear, too clear to her.

Colin was gone without a word of explanation, without a word of farewell, without coming to her for the answer to the request he had made her last night, and which she had promised to give him to-day.

Yes; it was quite clear. There was no doubt in her mind as to the reason of his abrupt departure.

He had recognised Godfrey, and would have nothing to do with the daughter of such a man; he had no longer any desire to connect himself with the family.

But even while her thoughts were full of Olive, she felt her husband ought at once to know the guest had returned to Nice. Much might be hanging upon it.

"Go, my darling," she whispered to Olive, "go to the smoking-room, and tell your father I want him to come and speak to me directly."

"I don't think papa is there," answered Olive. "We saw him about an hour ago running with all his might towards the station."

Hester quickly turned away her head that her child should not see the effect of her unexpected announcement.

She hastily left the room, and went to the smoking-room. Alas! she found Olive's information was correct.

There was no one there; and she realised with a sharp pang that her husband had purposely deceived her.

Colin Fraser all this time was chafing at the little station, having missed the train by a quarter of an hour.

The moment Olive had innocently pointed out to him her father's figure tearing in the direction of the station he had abruptly left her side, and torn after him.

His intention was to warn him of the plot which was being concocted against him at Nice, and to persuade him to remain where he was.

He strained every nerve to reach the station. But in vain.

Hard as he tried, he was too late; and arrived to find the train had started.

Detained thus for an hour or more, it was past mid-day before Colin reached Nice.

His plan now was to try, by all the means in his power, to persuade his friends to give up the idea of exposing Godfrey Seaforth; to announce to them his intention of withdrawing altogether from the plot, and to beg them to do the same.

Should he find them unwilling, he intended to urge his request on the ground that it was to him

now a personal and family matter, since he had made the discovery that the gambler was his step-father's own brother.

He went straight to the club, but found he was too late.

It was all over!

Godfrey Seaforth had been detected, exposed, disgraced, and had disappeared no one knew where.

CHAPTER XI.

In the Gardens of Monaco.

STRUCK dumb with consternation, Colin left the club, and took his way back to the station.

He supposed that most likely Godfrey would return home, and the hope of being of some use to the unhappy family made him determine to return to the châlet also.

His supposition proved correct, for he spied a skulking form disappearing into a carriage of the waiting train, and he got into the next compartment.

But the glimpse he had had of Godfrey Seaforth's face filled him with vague alarms. The idea of that awful face appearing in the orange-grove, made him quite giddy for a moment.

It seemed to him like Sin entering Paradise, and blighting for ever the happiness of its pure and innocent inhabitants.

To Colin's surprise, when the train stopped at the little station, no one got out from the next carriage. What could this mean? With a dread upon him of impending trouble Colin determined not to leave the train. He would follow Godfrey Seaforth, and keep watch over him. He felt it was not safe to leave him, and that he ought, for the family's sake, to find out where he was going, and what he was going to do.

On the first head he was not left long in doubt. When the train arrived at Monte Carlo, Godfrey was out in a moment, and disappeared in the crowd so rapidly that Colin lost sight of him.

However, he got out also, and joined the crowd which swarmed up the steps to the gaming establishment, and took his way to the tables.

The *salon de jeu* was crowded; but all the same he soon spied the figure of which he was in search, seating itself at the *rouge-et-noir* table, and about to begin to play.

Godfrey Seaforth's eyes had a wild, unnatural look about them, and he seemed strangely excited.

Afraid of attracting his attention, and yet so alarmed by his appearance as to be more determined than ever not to leave him, Colin went on to the *roulette* table for about half-an-hour, and then returned to the *rouge-et-noir* board.

Yes; still there; still playing. Playing heavily, madly, desperately—losing heavily, too.

Colin then left the *salon de jeu*, went into the ball-room, and sat down there to await the course of events.

The band was playing in its usual entrancing manner, and, carried away on the wings of the music, Colin's thoughts were soon set moving with a mixture of tremulous happiness, and a dull sense of pain, when suddenly he sees him coming.

How awful he looks! There is a nameless terror on his face, and a look of despair in his eye.

Hurrying through the ball-room, gliding from behind one marble column to another, he passes through the hall, and stealing past the tall, grave men in their blue and red liveries laced with gold, goes out through the open door into the gardens.

And here Colin, though he had followed him as quickly as he dared, loses sight of him.

But the reader can follow him still.

Stealing along, with that nameless expression of fear and horror on his face; skulking, like a thief, through the public walks, till he comes to a more secluded spot, where he halts, and with nerveless, trembling hands feels in his breast pocket, and takes out a pistol. . . . .

All around, the gorgeous scene of Nature's beauty—the tall parasol pine, the dark cypress, the graceful palm, bright orange, and fantastic fig-tree; the luxuriant growth of wild geranium, myrtle, oleander, cactus, and Indian fig;—above, the cloudless sky; and below, the blue waters of the Mediterranean!

So fair the background! And in the foreground a dishonoured, despairing man, flying from ruin and disgrace into ruin and crime more disgraceful still.

The loveliest place in all the world—and the wickedest!

Never had the sky been more cloudless, nor the

sea more blue;—never had the surroundings looked more pure and lovely;—never, amid the sin and discord of Earth, had they seemed more to speak of the peace and purity of Heaven—than on that day, and at that hour when Godfrey Seaforth shot himself in the Gardens of Monaco.

CHAPTER XII.

The End of it all.

It is Sunday in the little châlet. Mother and daughters have been reading the Church Prayers; and now the three girls are at the piano singing hymns.

They are singing the hymn to the dying year.

Hester, sitting by the window, gazing out, shudders, she hardly knows why, as the solemn refrain falls upon her ear—

> "As the tree falls, so must it lie,
> As the man lives, so must he die."

But a sudden change was given to her thoughts by the opening of the door, and the sound of the cry of joy with which Olive left the piano and sprang forward.

Surprised, Hester turned round, and saw Colin Fraser standing in the doorway.

But though he took Olive's hand in his, there

was no answering look of joy in his eye. He looked at Hester and said, "Send them away, and let me speak to you alone."

There was something in his whole aspect, in the look of horror which still pervaded his face, that made her feel that something fearful had happened. She came up to him as the door closed upon the girls. "You have come to tell me," she said quietly, as she laid her hand upon his arm, "that something has happened to my husband."

And, sitting down, as gently as he could, he told her all.

It had come then! The blow had at last fallen! The fears and forebodings she had always had, the presentiment ever in her mind, had at last come to their fulfilment. The terrible lesson which she had always felt he must at last be called upon to learn; —here it was!

But, O God! in her wildest moments she had never thought of such untold horror as this! Never could she have believed him to have fallen so low. Never could she have believed him to be capable of this!

Such fearful rebellion against his Maker; no moral sense, no conscience—nothing! No feeling for her even, nor for the disgrace he was bringing upon his family, and handing down to his children: the heritage of unutterable shame.

And so this was the end of it all! It was always to end like this.

All her thought and care wasted; all her prayers thrown away; all her influence vain.

All her ceaseless endeavours to lead him into the right path, all her silent hours of agonising intercession; all to end like this!

A disgraced life, a dishonoured name, and death by his own hand at last.

God had indeed taken the pruning-knife into his own hand: the rock was disintegrated, but, O God! how could it grow anything *now!*

Gradually as she sped along in the train with Colin on her way to Monaco, she grew calm enough to be thankful that he had not died on the spot: had not been cut off in a moment; that, though dying, he was not yet dead.

Faithful to nothing, true to no promise, bound

by no laws; yet still, in the old days, he had seemed sometimes to *listen* to her instructions, though he never retained or acted upon them.

Though he would talk and act the next day as if she had said nothing the day before, yet she had felt sure she had *at the time* made some faint impression. She had been able *sometimes* to bring to to bear all her influence upon him, to rouse his conscience and to get at his best feelings for a transient fit of earnestness, under the power of which he would sometimes make promises and form resolutions.

Oh for a transient fit of earnestness *now!* which would not, dying as he was, have time to pass away; and under the influence of which he might pass repenting into the presence of his Maker. Oh that he may yet find a place for repentance, if he sought it carefully with tears!

Might she not, perhaps, find him changed by the awful catastrophe?

Might this horrible event be an answer to her prayers after all?

Far from its being a proof that God had for-

saken him, might it not be one of His purposes concerning him, that he *should* fall into the very depths; because nothing less than sinking into such utter vileness, and becoming such an object of horror and detestation even to himself, could rouse him to a sense of what he was, and of what iniquity he was capable?

Something she had heard or read of, and it had fixed itself in her mind, of God sometimes making use of a terrible fall to reveal a sinner to himself; that sin being a disease, the man is not always conscious of his state. That he goes on from to day, and no one, himself included, is aware how sinful he is. That God then lets him fall to the very depths, to show him to himself and to others as he really is; that realising by his fall all the wickedness of which he is capable, he may look to God to raise him up out of the pit into which he has sunk. And so, by his very fall, he rises!

A messenger was waiting at the station at Monte Carlo, with a note from the doctor to say his patient was still alive; and they proceeded at once to the hotel.

"*Il demande, madame, à chaque instant,*" said the kind old doctor as he met her at the door; and held both her hands for a moment in sympathising pity. And then he let her into the chamber of death, and left her alone with her husband.

CHAPTER XIII.

Husband and Wife.

LOOKING down upon him as he lay, wandering, muttering, unconscious of her presence, a shrinking fear came over her, and her hopes died away.

It was not that she shrank herself from the polluted and blood-stained man; it was no physical fear. It was the fear suggested by the words of the hymn her girls had been so lately singing, and which kept repeating themselves in her brain.

> As the tree falls, so must it lie,
> As the man lives, so must he die;
> As the man dies, so must he be,
> All through the days of eternity.

It seemed to her the voices of his own children were ringing the knell of their father's hopes of salvation.

For it seemed so impossible he should be otherwise than he had always been, so certain that

death in itself can work no sudden and mysterious change.

The conviction came over her more surely than ever that death is in no sense an end, but merely an event, an episode, a development, in the course of the life which begins here, and continues throughout eternity; that as it finds the man, so will it leave him; he that is holy, holy still; he that is filthy, filthy still.

Yet she could not but feel she had no right to murmur or complain. Whatsoever a man soweth, *that* shall he also reap. He had sowed to the flesh, and he had reaped the reward of his sowing.

Yes. Godfrey Seaforth's punishment was natural, not arbitrary. For God's moral laws and judgments are as fixed and unalterable as the unchangeable laws of nature.

To the infringment of every law, moral as well as natural, its own penalty; and man, even here below, can no more escape the penalty annexed to the infringement of God's moral law, than can he who puts his hand into the flame escape being

burnt, or he who throws himself from the roof of his dwelling, escape being dashed to pieces.

And Godfrey had not escaped the penalties of the godless life he had led. He had sown to the flesh, and of the flesh he had reaped *corruption*. He had shut out God and love from his life, and God's punishment for this was the hardening of the heart.

Corruption and hardness of heart; these were the penalties annexed to such a course, and they had led him to deterioration, and deterioration to dishonour, and dishonour to disgrace, and disgrace to crime, till he had ended in this last mad act; this laying violent hands himself on the life God had given him, and which he had so wasted and misused.

She bent over him, and listened trembling to what he was saying, dreading what she might hear. She caught her own name; over and over again her own name.

As far as she could gather the meaning of his rambling and incoherent utterances, his mind had travelled back to the early and happiest days of their married life; before Godfrey was born.

And, as his speech grew more intelligible, she realised with wonder and gratitude that he was recalling and repeating some of her own old words of warning and instruction. Earnest words of hers, unheeded at the time, seemed to come crowding back upon his mind, and fell from his lips in confused and rambling speech.

Presently, as his mind got clearer, it reverted to more recent events, and to the last dire scene. With this recollection, he seemed to be seized with mortal dread and terror, and he tossed about wildly, and called loudly upon her to help and save him.

"Is she coming?" he cried; but he was not wandering now. "There is no time to lose. *Will* she come to me now? Come to such a——"

"Godfrey," she said softly, "I am here."

He did not seem to hear or notice, but the sound of her voice must have affected him somehow, for he burst out wildly, "Hester! I am lost! save me! I am lost for ever—blood-stained, guilty!"

Then there arose her soft voice in the silence: "'Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be

white as snow.' Godfrey, dear Godfrey, I am here."

"Hester!" he cried, suddenly perceiving her, and trying to hold out his arms. "Angel of my life, have you come to such a wretch as I? Oh, Hester! I have spoilt your life for you, and do you love me still? Save me, Hester! I am lost! lost for ever!"

He seemed in an agony of terror, and the cold drops of perspiration stood upon his brow. He clung to her, imploring her to pray for him, to save him from the awful doom which was impending, to stand between him and God's coming wrath. "You are pure and holy," he gasped wildly; "all your life long you have never erred. God will hear *you*. *Pray* me into Heaven."

And at her quick, though gentle, repudiation of such praise, he burst out: "I know it! I have always known it. Have I not watched you all these years?"

Then she listened with almost terrified thankfulness to his incoherent assurances that he believed, he always had believed, in God, and Christ, and goodness, though he had never acted on his belief;

that he could not but do so in the sight of a life like hers. He had, he told her, had holiness ever in his presence, her life had revealed to him a life hid with Christ in God. She had acted the Bible in her daily life, not talking about it, but habitually living out the truths and principles which it taught, by her gentle Christlike temper, by her untiring patience, by her forbearance under his sore provocation. By her bravery, too, her courage in resisting him when he wished her to act in a way her conscience could not approve, by her calm grand continuance in the path from which he had tried to turn her.

She had not preached, nor nagged, nor lectured, but she had steadily and consistently *acted*. He had "not obeyed the Word, but without the Word he had been won by the conversation of his wife." Aye; there is neither speech nor language, but their voices *are* heard; the voices of such wives are heard at last.

Thank God! those years of thought, and care, and striving had not been for nothing after all! Her life had not been wasted; her prayers not

thrown away. She had cast her bread upon the waters, but she *had* found it after many days.

It was almost worth her long life of sorrow and trouble for an hour like this, and as she sank upon her knees, she murmured, "O God! Thy power is infinite. Thy mercy is infinite, too!"

CHAPTER XIV.

Godfrey's Confession.

ALL through the night she knelt and prayed by his side; and sought, by dwelling on the simple foundations of our faith, to bring peace to his mind.

Gradually his face assumed a calmer expression. But a troubled look came over it at times, and he seemed still to have something to say.

Was it physical weakness and inability to collect his thoughts, or the old moral weakness and vacillation of character keeping its hold on him still? Who shall say?

But as the cold grey of morning dawned, both were overcome, and he called her to his side again.

"Now, Hester," he said feebly, "let me make restitution before I go."

"It is not needful," she tenderly answered. "I have forgiven it all long, long ago."

"But I have still something to tell you," he whispered. "I have not told you all. I cannot die happy till I have told you. I know you ought to be told."

"What is it?" she whispered soothingly.

"Come nearer," he said. "Come here. Put your arm round me—so. . . . . Now say you will still forgive me, in spite of what I am going to say . . . . Promise that you will not take your arms away . . . . but let me die . . . feeling your kiss of pardon on my lips."

"Surely," she answered, "why should you fear?"

He drew her head down, and whispered something in her ear.

. . . . . .

Whiter and whiter grew her face as she listened, more and more rigid her form. Slowly her arms relaxed their hold of him, and a change came over her whole expression; a look of horror into her eye.

He tightened his hold as he felt her shrink from him, but she shook herself free, and started to her feet.

Retreating from his side, to the other end of the room, she wound her arms round one of the pillars that supported the ceiling, and there she stood motionless, speechless, trembling, with her head turned away.

"Hester!" he moaned; but she took no heed of him.

She only turned upon him for a moment such a look as Eve might have turned upon Cain when he confessed to her that he had slain his brother Abel.

And all this time he kept moaning, "Forgive me! Forgive me! Kiss me before I die!"

She turned away with a shiver, and, looking at anything rather than at him, said at last, in a hard, dry voice:

"I *cannot* forgive you, Godfrey."

She hardly sees him; is barely conscious of his presence. There is another vision on which her eyes are fixed.

A fair young life—blasted! A life of hope, and fame, and distinction — cut short! A proud and honourable career nipped in its very bud. And in-

stead?—a life of ignominy, a name sullied, a fair fame stained, young hopes—shattered! And all for what?

To screen a forger and a gambler, who was to die by his own hand at last.

"May God forgive you," burst from the poor mother in her agony. "I cannot."

Who can forgive sins but God only? True, poor mother; but you are disproving all you have been trying to teach. By turning away from the sinful man in the hour of his extremity you are darkening the hope of a dying soul.

Is not your judgment to him a reflection of God's, a type or emblem to him of coming wrath or coming mercy? Are you not, by your attitude of unforgiveness, making the hope of God's pardoning mercy, through Christ, which had dawned upon his soul, seem uncertain, and, at last, even incredible?

Alas! poor mother! She cannot think of it all yet. Let her alone. Wait till the first bitterness is overpast, and then she will think on these things.

But now her thoughts are far away. Let her

alone. She is thinking of her boy's calm grand continuance in the path of devotion and self-sacrifice.

She is thinking how the lessons taught him by the example of his Lord and Master have in his young life been worked out; how he has wrought the Christian dogma into his very being, and probed to their depths the sufferings which come of sacrificing self, and of bearing the punishment due to others. What he must have suffered! What he must have endured! What lonely, silent endurance! How grandly, how nobly borne!

The thought of his young courage and devotion, all founded on a mistake, affected her suddenly, and she burst into a passion of tears.

Let her alone. It will all come right now.

Shall she be less noble than he?

Ah! he has left her far behind. She is still struggling, sinful and earth-bound. And he? He has long ago turned his back on the struggle and joined, even on earth, the noble army of martyrs. Shall his devotion be fruitless, and his desire to screen his father in vain? Shall the father he has

bled for die, after all, unblessed and unforgiven? Shall it be thus that she, his mother, shall repay him for his life of devotion, and his years of uncomplaining self-sacrifice?

"Oh, Godfrey! Godfrey!" she cried, suddenly throwing herself on her knees by the bed and hiding her face, "how *could* you? How *could* you?——"

It has been a hard and terrible struggle, but it is over now. And the reward shall surely come.

She wound her forgiving arms round him and pressed her lips to his brow.

And as she did so it came:

"Hester . . ." faintly gasped the dying man, "I ask you to forgive me . . . . *for our boy's sake* . . . ."

BOOK VII.

BOOK XII

CHAPTER I.

Godfrey's twenty-fifth Birthday.

At last! At last the day has come: the day for which Lord Seaforth has been waiting these many weary months, these three long years.

It is Godfrey's twenty-fifth birthday. Everything is ready, and before the day is over Lord Seaforth will have set his hand and seal to the document which cuts Godfrey off for ever from the property, and makes little Joan one of the greatest heiresses in England.

It is about eleven o'clock, and Lord Seaforth is sitting in the library, busy with many thoughts, glancing every now and then at the unsuspecting heiress, who is busy to-day with many thoughts too.

Yes, the day has come! This day Godfrey is to reap the reward of his sowing.

Yet it is not a day of joy and triumph after all.

He had hoped it would be, but now that it has come all his feelings are of sorrow and regret.

He has been hardening his heart against him all these years; trying to shut him out from his life and thoughts, steeling himself against him to the very utmost. In vain! Just as he had persuaded himself he was beginning to forget him, a sharp pang would strike his heart as his eye rested on the empty chair where he had been wont to watch him for hours sitting, his handsome face bent over his book, the leaves turning at intervals; and a craving longing to see him once more, to hear something of him, would overpower him. What was he doing? How was he living?

It would have been easy enough to find out. The lawyers connected with the entail of course knew; but he had refused to allow himself to make any inquiries. So much, at any rate, he could make himself do: he could *act* the hard and relentless tyrant; though he could not feel any satisfaction in doing it—though righteous indignation and love of retribution had no place in his heart.

It was all forced: not natural. No wonder. He

was doing that hard and difficult thing—fighting against his own nature.

Still did he imagine he could conquer it. He did not know himself yet. He was an example of the theory that we do not know ourselves as others know us: for he had not yet gauged the strength and tenacity of his own feelings, as his wife had gauged them long ago.

His own intensity of affection and unchanging fidelity were too much for him.

Here, now, on this long-looked-for day, he knows in himself that he loves Godfrey still!

Another glance at his daughter. He must not think any more.

He must speak to her at once, and get it over.

"Joan," he said, "are you aware that you have this day become one of the greatest heiresses in England? This day, this twenty-sixth of January, the entail on the estate is by mutual agreement cut off, and Seaforth is settled on you."

Joan flushed crimson, and clasped her hands together. She realised, quick as lightning, what this

meant, and a tumult of indignation overpowered her.

Her father took these signs of surprise and emotion for natural feeling at the thought of such a weight of honour and glory falling to her share.

He went on to give an account of his arrangements with the lawyers, whom he now proposed to summon; and tried to reassure her, by hinting faintly that she would not have to bear the burden of responsibility alone. He tried to convey to her distantly that there was a possibility of his receiving an offer for her hand from a quarter where he would be ready to bestow it.

Joan sat very still till he had finished.

By that time she had had time to control herself and to resolve upon a course of action. Meanwhile, her visit to Ainsbro' and all that it had been intended to bring about became clear to her.

"I shall never marry," she said quietly and firmly.

Her tone attracted Lord Seaforth's attention, and he looked up quickly. He was surprised at the expression of quiet determination which pervaded every line of her face.

"Never marry!" he exclaimed; "and why?"

Joan folded her hands quietly together, but she made no answer.

He looked at her again, and, as he looked, for the first time it struck him how like her eyes were to his own, to Godfrey's, and to every other Seaforth's. For the first time he felt that this was his child, a part of himself; and at the same moment he read his own spirit of uncompromising determination in the eyes of his daughter. He felt his position to be very perplexing.

"You are very young," he said, rather nervously; "all young girls talk like that."

No answer.

"You are only eighteen. You will change your mind some day."

Still no answer; and Lord Seaforth was getting more and more perplexed.

"Supposing, then," he said at last, "that, for the sake of the argument, we say that you will, as you affirm, never marry—the fact remains the same. You are still one of the greatest heiresses in England; still this day the estate is settled upon you."

She slightly shook her head.

What did she mean?

"You can settle it on me if you please," she answered, in a low voice; "but it will only come to the same thing—I should only give it back."

"Give it back!" he exclaimed, "and to whom?"

"To him who alone has a right to it," she answered firmly; "to Godfrey Seaforth, your nephew and rightful heir."

She raised her beautiful eyes as she spoke and looked her father full in the face. Her small head was erect now with pride and defiance. She stood revealed a champion for the rights of the man she loved!

Looking full into the depths of her dark eyes, and taught by his own experience, something electric communicated itself to Lord Seaforth.

In that moment he guessed her secret!

He read his own story in hers: something of his own unchanging, never-dying fidelity to the object once loved; and realised that history was repeated in her life, and that their love and fidelity was given to the same object.

His heart went out to his daughter, and his very soul was wrung with pity for her fate. Alas! that another should have to pass through a like furnace of suffering and disappointment! Alas! that his own child should, like himself, have misplaced her love and her confidence, and given her young affections to one so utterly unworthy!

He longed to help her and to comfort her. What could he do? Across the gulf of their divided lives dared he stretch the bridge of sympathy, the hand of fatherly pity and fellow-feeling? No! Never.

That much he read in her eyes; in the proud reserve of a neglected child; to which the reserve of a woman's pride was now added.

No! there was no hope of that. No words of his could wring her secret from her; no help could by him be given.

He may not now break down the wall his own hand had raised between them.

Nothing can undo the past nor alter the relationship in which they stand to one another, and which he himself had instituted.

He had given her nothing in the past, and she will accept nothing from him now.

He gazed at her sadly, yearningly, and then turned away.

"Poor child!" he murmured, "poor girl! God help her! I cannot."

He tottered to a chair, and sitting down began to think what was to be done next. Here was Seaforth returned upon his hands again. He had actually lived to see it refused on all sides, and tossed like a ball from one to the other!

First Hester, then Godfrey, now Joan.

Alike! how alike, all three! Each in turn had refused the greatness and the glory he had offered to shower upon them.

Hester, a pensioner on another's bounty, had refused it all without a thought. Godfrey, equally penniless, had resigned all his pretensions, without making a single condition.

This young girl was ready to do the same.

What made them all so unworldly? How came they to value so lightly what he so highly prized? This will not do. He must not think. He must act.

He must break through this train of weak and sentimental thought by at once ringing the bell and sending for the lawyers.

He rose and laid his hand on the bell.

Joan, who was moving away, glanced at him as she left the room, and thought how old and bent he looked; and marked the uncertainty of his gait and the trembling of his hands. The servant entered the room, bringing in the newspapers.

Joan was half-way across the adjoining room, when she was startled by a curious sound which fell upon her ear, followed by a heavy fall.

Alarmed, she hurried back, and to her horror found her father lying on the ground, stiff and motionless.

She rang the bell violently, and then, bending over his prostrate form, she strove to render him some assistance and to raise him from the ground.

But he lay like a stone, cold and rigid.

Horrified, she bent closer over him, and as she did so her eye fell upon the newspaper which was tightly clutched in his hand.

And there, at the head of a paragraph, she read the words, "Suicide of Mr. Godfrey Seaforth!"

CHAPTER II.

The Irony of Fate.

TREAD softly in the darkened chamber, round the curtained bed, where lies the stricken and helpless form which is all that remains of the proud and self-willed man whose career we have followed for so long.

Tread softly in the darkened chamber, nor mock its sadness with a smile.

We have seen him like a proud ship sailing on life's sea, with sails set and pennon gaily waving in the wind; carrying, as we know, nor chart nor compass; secure in his own strength and wisdom, feeling he needed nothing to guide him safely. Did he not know the way full well?

And now!

Ruined, wrecked, shattered; drifting, mastless and broken, at the mercy of the winds and waves —whither? Into the dark and fathomless ocean which rolls round the world?

No! the doctors say he will not die; the merciful gates of death are not to open to him yet; but death in life is to be his portion now.

Helpless, hopeless, paralysed; limbs nerveless, and speech unintelligible—there he lies! "*Je me suffis.*"

Oh! the irony of fate!

How merry she might make her over a scene like this! How she might say, like the prophet of old, "Cry aloud! call upon your gods!" and mock when no answer came.

His gods. Yes. Let him call upon them now. Time, habit, self-will, self-respect, the gods to whom he bowed, and in whom he trusted, will they not come to his help?

In vain!

The thunderbolt of heaven has *this* time fallen too hot and heavy.

This time he *must* recognise God's hand; this time he must bow to a higher Will.

No self-will, phœnix-like, can spring from such ruin as this; and from the ashes of *this* past there can be no rising again.

Joan, all her woman's heart now moved with pity, tends him with devoted care.

There is no doubt in her mind that, reading no further than the heading of the paragraph, he had jumped at once to one conclusion and not had time to realise that the Godfrey Seaforth referred to was his brother, and not his nephew.

Day by day she waited for an opportunity of enlightening him; but there had been no chance of it. He had never yet been sufficiently alive to what was going on around him for it to be of any use to make the attempt.

As she watched and waited her own thoughts were very full. A wild hope would sometimes come across her that the clearing up of the mystery in which Godfrey's life was shrouded might follow on his father's death.

But time went by and she heard no tidings.

Still day after day found her watching, waiting, and hoping.

Within, there was no change in her father's condition, and no sign or sound from without.

BOOK VIII.

CHAPTER I.

Lincoln's Inn Fields.

A SMALL dingy lodging in the neighbourhood of Lincoln's Inn, with fog up to the windows, and the remains of snow on the opposite roofs.

The very small fire, which is slowly dying in the grate, does not contribute much to the warmth of the little apartment, does not certainly extend its heat sufficiently to reach the young man who, evidently recovering from an illness, is lying in bed, reading.

A knock at the door, and an ill-clad woman-of-all-work comes in and announces that the doctor is below.

"Show him up, if you please," says Godfrey, for it is he who we find in this poor little place.

"And if you please, sir," added the woman, "there's been a clergyman after you more nor once since you was took."

"A clergyman!" said Godfrey, inwardly wondering. "Have I been so ill as that?"

"And how are you this evening?" says the cheery voice of the doctor.

"Much better, I think," answered Godfrey, extending a rather thin hand of greeting. "Tell me, doctor—for I get confused about dates—have I been ill long? And when shall I be able to begin my work again?"

The doctor shook his head. "You must not think of work for a long time. You want a thorough rest of mind and body. You have had a sharp attack of fever, brought on entirely by over-work. You must keep quiet and be very careful. I should like to make a bonfire of all your law-books; and by the way," he added, glancing at the fast-dying fire, "they would not come amiss to that poor affair. What a wretched attempt for a raw February day!" The good-natured doctor advanced to the fire and began trying to improve it; but the scuttle was nearly empty.

"We lawyers," said Godfrey, with a smile, "can't afford to be ill. No fees, no fuel. Idleness for

some weeks makes the exchequer low and the coal-cellar empty."

"Well, you rest a little longer," said the doctor as he took his leave, "and you'll get back to your work and your fees all the sooner. And don't read more than you can help," he added, looking with disgust at the very dry-looking volume on which Godfrey had been engaged on his entrance.

Godfrey smiled sadly after the doctor was gone. "I *must* read," he said to himself as he took up his volume again; "anything is better than thinking."

He lay very quiet for some time, but gradually the book dropped from his grasp and he fell asleep.

Some time elapsed. The fire flickered a little, the room got darker; outside the snow began to fall again.

The door opens very softly, and Hester, arrayed in the sombre garments of her widowhood, comes in.

She first gazes round the poverty-stricken apartment, and then she advances almost reverently and kneels down by the side of the bed. He is lying sleeping, as she has often watched him in his boyhood, quietly, peacefully, like a child.

And as she gazed, her heart beat high with pride and wonder that anything so grand, so noble, should have been cradled in her arms and taught at her knee.

And it is still the martyr-brow on which she gazes; still does it bear the brand of suspicion and guilt.

She has learnt from the woman below, that he has been ill three weeks, so she knows he can have seen no newspapers, and is therefore in ignorance of what has befallen.

She is almost thankful that it is so, glad and grateful that hers is to be the hand to remove the chain that binds him, hers the lips to speak the words which will set him free.

She glances again at the signs of poverty around her, at the wretched, fast-dying fire, and the tears rush to her eyes.

He stirs in his sleep. The word "Mother" escapes from his lips.

Is he dreaming of the old days at home?

She bends over him, and he wakes with her kiss on his brow.

"Mother!" rang out his voice clear and joyful in the glad surprise of the first moment; and he started up and held out his hands.

But even as he spoke recollection returned to him. A change came over his face, his hands dropped, and he turned his face to the wall. He must be on his guard, be firm. She has come to wrest his secret from him, and that secret must not be wrested.

"Godfrey," she implored, "my own boy, do not turn from me. I do not ask you to speak, but only to look at me."

Slowly he turned at last, for his eyes were longing to rest on her face again. And his eye wandered wondering over her mourning garments, till they rested on the widow's cap which crowned while it did not hide her still lovely hair.

"*Is he dead?*" he whispered, while he clasped her hands in both of his and held them tightly.

"He is dead," she answered. "He has told me everything, and you are free, my darling, from the burden you have borne so bravely and so long!" . . . .

CHAPTER II.

Godfrey's History.

"And now," said Hester, when the first excitement had a little subsided, "tell me all about it. Let me hear the truth at last."

Holding his hands, she prayed him to speak to her quite irrespective of the dead man.

"It can do him nor good nor harm," she whispered. "And, oh! Godfrey, I am so weary of mystery and concealment. Henceforth I pray you, darling, there may be no secrets between us. Tell me all. In my turn I will tell you everything which in your early youth I withheld from you."

Thus urged, Godfrey could not but consent to her entreaty.

He began from the time when his allowance had been first settled upon him, which was the beginning of all his troubles.

It must have been very soon after he had so

proudly sent his mother and sisters his first cheque that the idea of forging his name had entered into the mind of his father. It was done at first for small sums, and so it was some time before Godfrey had noticed any discrepancy in his accounts. But by and by a very large sum was drawn, and by that time he had become most bewildered.

Still it was a long time before the truth dawned upon him, and even then he could hardly believe the evidence of his own senses. How to act under the circumstances he had been for a long while unable to make up his mind. He did nothing for a time, hoping that perhaps it might not occur again.

But time went on—larger sums were drawn, and it was clear that if matters went on at this rate it would come to the knowledge of his uncle. He at last made up his mind to write to his father, to let him at any rate know that he was aware of what was going on, and to see whether he could not work upon his feelings by representing to him the disgrace into which he must shortly fall. While waiting for the answer to this letter he had had to

return to Seaforth; and it had been forwarded to him there.

In this answer his father did not attempt to deny that he had drawn these large sums, but added that he considered he had a perfect right to do so. The money was his; he was the legal and lawful heir-presumptive, deprived of his rights by a freak of his brother's.

After receiving this letter hope left Godfrey's breast. He saw his father was determined to continue his practices; and as he knew the money was used for gambling purposes he felt there was no limit to the amount that might be drawn.

It was at this time that his first interview with his uncle took place. His primary care was to ward off all suspicion from his father. His feeling all through the conversation was the old antagonism against his uncle for his dealings with his father in his youth, which were the remote causes of all his present trouble.

On his return to Oxford he again wrote to his father, and offered to supply him with money himself, if he would keep within a certain sum. He

implored him to discontinue his practices, earnestly setting before him what an offence forgery was in the eyes of the law, and what terrible disgrace would follow if he were discovered.

To this letter an answer was returned which showed Godfrey the case was hopeless. His father upbraided him with his words, and said that unless *he* chose to turn informant the discovery would never be made; repeated what he had said at first, that he had a perfect right to the money; and added that, as he was only writing his own name, he did not see how the act could in any way be constituted into a legal offence.

It now became necessary for Godfrey to resolve upon some definite course of action. Either all his own hopes for the future must be relinquished, or his father must be disgraced.

There was no alternative between the two.

What an opportunity was here presented to him of making up to his father for all, and at the same time sparing his mother the knowledge of her husband's guilt! If it were such a blow to him, Godfrey, to discover his father had fallen so low, what

would it be to her! She, who loved him so devotedly, and believed in him so firmly; who had so often, in Godfrey's boyhood, told him of the injustice and harshness with which his father had been treated, and the way in which in early life he had been mismanaged and misunderstood. She should remain in that opinion still. At all costs the knowledge should be concealed from her. She should never know; she and his little sisters should be spared for ever the hearing of this tale of guilt and shame.

At once and for ever his mind was made up; and when his uncle announced to him his intention of sending for his mother he resolved at once to fly. The thought of her arrival hastened the crisis. To meet her was impossible; to keep up this deception face to face with her a thing too difficult to be attempted.

Painful as he felt his conduct would be to her, he comforted himself with the reflection that he was sparing her a yet more bitter pain.

The sacrifice he had resolved upon was thus promptly carried out.

Fair name and character he sacrificed at once; relinquished thus all hopes of a career of distinction, of earthly fame and usefulness; left Seaforth secretly, and went to London, without giving himself time to think.

Once there, in the long, objectless days that followed, alone in the crowd of London, he became a prey to a feeling of utter dejection.

"His sufferings will be intelligible to anyone who has ever conceived a sublime mission with a warm heart, and felt hope and courage fail in the idea of executing it." He felt that it was easy to do wonders when upheld by the sympathy of those you love, and the approval of those whose opinion you value; but quite another thing to go out into the darkness of ignominy and isolation, and the loneliness of suspicion and misunderstanding.

His deepest regret was little Joan.

It was so hard that she should feel he had deserted her; so bitter that she should believe him guilty too. He grieved so at the thought that she should regard him in this light, and that he should apparently nullify by his practice all the precepts

he had taught her. Could he communicate with her? Could he trust her with the secret?

No; it could not be. It was not to be thought of. He must not dream of laying on the shoulders of another a burden he found so hard to bear himself.

He could not, child as she was, let her into so guilty a secret; and her love for him might lead her some day to proclaim the innocent and to expose the guilty.

No; she alas! must be sacrificed to his father too. There was nothing for it but to leave her in complete ignorance, like all the world beside.

His outlook for the future was indeed overwhelming, and the loneliness and hopelessness of his position great. His life being all marred, he would never be able, as he had always hoped, to do anything for his mother and sisters. His chosen path, politics, was now quite impossible.

But the rebound of youth is very powerful, and after a time came to his help the feeling he had always had, that he had it in him, born in him,

to do something, to be something, to make his own way.

And his spirit rose at the thought of the difficulty. The more difficulty, the more glory.

He had an obstinate feeling within him, which would not be kept down, that though that chosen path of his was certainly more difficult now, though it was put off probably for many years, yet that it would still be his one day.

His faith did not fail him at this crisis. He believed firmly in God's power of bringing good out of all this; if not to him, then to others; if not here, then hereafter. Feeling sure that out of this darkness light must come some day, he stuck steadily to the measure of light he had, and never allowed himself to sink into despair.

Besides, it was not all suffering. He was ever upheld by the thought that he was screening his father, and thus making many happy; and to bear pain instead of, and for the sake of, another, has in it a pure and ennobling happiness which none save they who have experienced it know.

But he felt he must have work. God would

give it to him as a help. Without it the sadness of his life would have been too overpowering for him to bear.

He had his fellowship, and on that he felt he could live, while he gave himself up to reading and study.

Oh, work! God's blessing to many a weary-minded man.

It is the idle who are wretched. Godfrey firmly believed this. He had the fixed idea, too, which lives in the breast of many a noble and true man, that each man should live and work as if no one but himself could do the special work which lies to his hand, and in the full realisation that he has only a short and uncertain time in which to do it.

He now tried to drown, as it were, the sorrows and regretful longings of his life in work.

He began a course of hard reading for the Bar. He took a small lodging in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and there he read and worked night and day, living on the income his fellowship gave him, till he was called to the Bar.

In this life he became entirely engrossed.

His love of reading and study was its great alleviation.

"Nobody," as Lord Seaforth had once said, "could be very unhappy who possessed the power of thus losing self and being independent of present surroundings and outward circumstances."

And it was, in a sense, true.

And yet, sometimes in the evening, sitting in his little lodging by the fire, such sad thoughts would assail him, and such a sense of the void and emptiness in his heart and life come over him, that his book would drop from his hand, and he sit gazing into the fire in mute and tearless despair.

Sadly across him at such times would come the thought of little Joan.

Stealing unawares into his presence would come the little figure; the great dark eyes, with their trusting expression, would look up at him once more.

How was she faring without him? Did she ever think of him she had trusted, who had responded to her trust so ill, and deserted her without a word of explanation?

How was it all to end? Would she be faithful to his memory? Should he ever see her again?

At this point Godfrey's voice grew so faint and broken that Hester had to bend over him to hear.

She caught his impassioned declaration of his ever-abiding love and devotion for his little cousin; and, bending closer, she gathered with joy and thankfulness that all his fears and misgivings concerning her had some time since been turned into rejoicing—that he had met her in the autumn stillness, and found that she loved him still.

We leave it to the reader to imagine how a mother would be likely to be affected by the tale just told.

All that we will say is, that Hester, probably more than most, was moved by it to the most vivid, almost reverent admiration.

For, to her, the loneliness and strength of silent endurance had always seemed the grandest thing in life; and it was a most bewildering sensation that her own ideal of all that was most noble should have been worked out in the life of her own son.

CHAPTER III.

Explanations.

HESTER felt that for the moment the past had been sufficiently dwelt upon. She therefore reserved her promised recital for another occasion, and gave Godfrey an account of more recent events. She explained to him that Andrew Fraser, prompted by his brother Colin, had never rested till he had discovered his abode, and had telegraphed to her that he was ill with a fever in this little lodging. That she and his sisters had at once started for England, and been met on their arrival by Andrew and Mr. Cartwright. That the latter had most kindly taken the three girls down to his home in Warwickshire, where they were under the care of Lady Margaret for the present.

She was, she told him, much perplexed about the future, as Lord Seaforth had returned no answer to the letters she had written him. She added that

Andrew Fraser had now gone down to Seaforth to seek a personal interview, and was to come straight here on his return; that, in short, she expected him this evening.

Towards night he arrived.

As he entered the room Hester drew back to allow the young men to meet alone. She could see how warmly they grasped one another's hands, and how Andrew, bending down, spoke for some time in a low, earnest voice, to which Godfrey replied by another warm grasp of the hand.

Andrew then placed a chair for Hester, and sitting down also himself, informed his astonished listeners that Lord Seaforth was lying stricken with paralysis, and that Godfrey was now, to all intents and purposes, absolute master of everything.

"How can that be?" hastily inquired Godfrey. "The entail was cut off on my twenty-fifth birthday, and I have no more to do with Seaforth than you have."

"*L'homme propose, Dieu dispose*," answered Andrew. "It was on that very day, just as he was about to summon the lawyers to sign the documents,

that Lord Seaforth was suddenly seized with paralysis, and he has never spoken since."

So from the couch in the dingy lodging where he had laid himself down, a needy struggling lawyer, Godfrey was to rise the lord of all.

And as the three sat together in the gathering twilight their thoughts were very busy with the intricate windings of the paths of life which had led at last to this.

"My sister," said Andrew at last, addressing himself to Hester, "has desired me to beg you and your daughters to come at once to Seaforth, as she knows her father would have done long since had he been able. And your presence," he continued to Godfrey, "is very necessary. There is a great deal of business to be done, and many unopened letters—all of ours among the number."

It was then definitely arranged that as soon as Godfrey was sufficiently recovered he and his mother and sisters should all go to Seaforth.

The doctors there were of opinion that the sudden shock of a glad surprise would be more conducive to the recovery of Lord Seaforth's

powers of speech and movement than anything else.

"What I want to know," said Godfrey, "is, what caused my uncle's stroke of paralysis?"

Andrew looked confused, but answered quietly, "My sister told me all about it. I will either explain it all to you in private or to Mrs. Seaforth; but you will not, I hope, ask me to do so in presence of you both."

Hester accordingly retired into another room with Andrew, and after some minutes' conversation he took his leave, and she returned to Godfrey's bedside.

"Can you bear to hear?" she said as she sat down and took his hand in hers. "Oh, my darling, you have always misjudged him so; you have never valued his deep affection. It was my fault, I know; but you will perhaps realise a little what the love must have been to cause such a catastrophe as this. For he thought, he thinks still, that it is you of whose sad and terrible end he read quite suddenly."

She then proceeded to give the whole early his-

tory of the two brothers, and to show how Lord Seaforth had been made to suffer.

And as his mother proceeded with her tale, pity and gratitude at last woke up in Godfrey's heart.

He saw how he had failed to appreciate his uncle's good qualities, and, biassed ever by a deep-rooted prejudice, founded on a misconception, failed to give him his due.

Godfrey's convalescence now proceeded rapidly, and in the course of a week he was well enough to leave London and to proceed to Seaforth.

The day before his departure the three girls arrived, and joyful indeed was the meeting which took place between the long-divided brother and sisters.

CHAPTER IV.

The Figures by Lord Seaforth's Bedside.

LET us return to the bedside of the stricken man, to whom, though he had no power to make others aware of the fact, consciousness of what had passed, and of what was passing around him, was now returning.

He had no wish to make others conscious of him. He shrank from everyone, more especially from his daughter, of whose watchful form, sitting not far from his bed, he was fully aware. How came she to be there? Why did she care to watch and tend him? What mattered it whether he lived or died; least of all to her? He had driven the man she loved to a cruel death. By him, by his harshness, Godfrey had been hunted to a terrible end; and now what mattered anything?

How quiet she sits—always so quiet and silent?

How can she sit there at all? How can she bear to be near him?

He wondered sometimes if it were really Joan or only a figure.

Such a longing to hear her say she forgave him his part in the terrible transaction came over him, that he tried one day to attract her attention. He tried to say "Joan." But no sound came.

He tried again—an unintelligible murmur, which he heard himself, but which did not attract her attention.

Good God! was his power of speech gone? Was he never to be able to express his contrition, never to ask her pardon for his share in the sorrows of her life?

Oh, wretched man that he was! wretched life, wretched end!

"This was how God had dealt with him:" laid him on a bed of helplessness, unable to move or speak, and said, "Lie there face to face with God and think."

And he did.

Like a map unrolled before him his past life

rose before his eyes, and he realised at last what a fiasco it had been.

What a long course of self-will and failure! What wheel within wheel of wilful mistakes, and their inevitable consequences! As husband and as father how wilful, how hard he had been!

How determined he had been, and how proud of being determined, about many things which now seemed unimportant!

Revenging himself all his life long on his wife for her early deception by his systematic neglect of her sons. How proud he had always been of his consistency in that matter, and what a waste of life it seemed now!

Then his daughter. Revenge again. And for what?

First, for the fact of her sex, and then for an accidental likeness.

How senseless, how wicked it was!

And the inevitable consequence, the just retribution? He had irretrievably alienated his only child. Her confidence and her affection were lost to him for ever.

Wife and child both hardened against him! Poisoned for ever those pure sources of affection.

Yet they *could* love.

How his wife had loved her boys! And his daughter—ah! how lovely her eyes had looked that day when she spoke of him who was gone; when she stood champion for his rights so boldly!

Poor child! There she sits, so quiet and silent. He fancied he could move his arm a little. He lifted it up, and tried to make a sign. He took hold of the heavy curtain; it moved—it shook the hangings above.

And Joan moved too. She started and looked up.

She is coming! O God! how shall he bear the grief, the reproach in her face, the mute sorrow and despair in her eyes?

She is coming. She is quite near now. She is bending over him to speak. How is this? Her face is beaming with joy, her eyes suffused with happy tears.

"Dear father!" she is saying very softly, "do you know me at last? Can you listen, father, to what I

have to say? Godfrey is alive and well. It was your brother's death you read."

After that nothing is very clear to him for some time. Confused figures swim before his eyes, young girlish forms flit in and out of his room.

Hester comes sometimes and smiles upon him—Hester as he remembers her on the night of Godfrey's flight; and then again sometimes another Hester, a young girlish Hester, the Hester of old, with the light step of youth and its gay, dancing expression in her face. What does it all mean? Perhaps Joan will tell him.

He motions her once more to his side, and tries to express in his eyes the question his poor maimed tongue refuses to utter.

And in a low, thrilling voice she tells him at last the meaning of it all; tells him such a wondrous tale of self-devotion and self-sacrifice, that in his bewilderment and agitation he tries to put out his trembling hands to stop her, that he may have time to think of it awhile.

But she goes on. With all a loving woman's pride and joy in the noble conduct of the man she

loves she tells the tale to its very ending, and then her figure disappears from his bedside and her place is empty.

Who is this standing where she has so lately been? This tall, noble figure, with the beauty of manhood added to the grace of youth; this well-known face, from which all sternness has departed; these dark eyes from which every trace of coldness and antagonism has fled; whose deep, rich voice sounds in the silence with the old familiar name, unheard so long? "Uncle Harold!"

A wild struggle for speech, an unintelligible sound; another—one more effort, and there bursts from his lips a word, stammering, indeed, incoherent, but still a word—"Godfrey!"

"Thank God, dear Uncle Harold," says the beloved voice of his darling, "your speech is restored to you. We shall all be happy now!"

CHAPTER V.

The Meeting of the Lovers in the Old Picture-Gallery.

COME we to the old picture-gallery once more, where, in the moonlight which floods it from one end to the other, the reunited lovers are standing hand-in-hand: to be parted this time never again!

Here again, as once before, with "Godfrey, Earl of Seaforth," looking down upon them, and the groups of children round, he vows himself from this moment to devote his life to her, and to the endeavour to make her happy; to atone to her, not only for those early sorrows of which he had been the innocent cause, but for that added suffering which his peculiar life and circumstances had entailed upon her—for the long, long years of loneliness, for his seeming desertion, for his broken vows, for his enforced leaving her in ignorance and apparent want of trust and confidence.

What the temptation had been in that interview

in the meadows to trust her with his secret he could never tell her; what it had cost him to refuse her entreaty to reveal to her the mystery lying on his life he could never say—what the longing had been to hear her say she still believed in him, in the teeth of all the evidence against him.

But he had felt bound to resist the temptation, feeling it would not be right to put her into such a false position—to make her, as it were, a participator in a fraud.

It had been, he told her, the most bitter part of all the bitterness his chosen path had entailed upon him to feel that he was deserting her, that he was leaving her to her fate. He had felt, he said, like the captain who deserts the sinking ship, leaving the women and children on board. And yet, at the time, it was the only thing to be done. There was no help for it.

But now! With clean hands and a vindicated character he stands before her; and now he may take up the vows he had broken, take up for ever the loving task he had once been forced to lay down. Now may he take her life into his own safe

keeping, into the shelter of his own love and care. Now may it be his to devote his life to flood her path with love and sunshine, and to make its radiant light atone for all past darkness.

Now may their young dreams have a bright fulfilling: fame and distinction for one, tender devotion for the other, love and happiness for both.

Now may they reap the harvest of happy memories; golden days of light and love may be theirs once more!

And as the full realisation of the dream of joy he painted burst upon the vision of little Joan, she shaded her eyes with her hand like one dazzled, while she murmured, "I am not worthy of such happiness. Oh, Godfrey! how is it that you love me so?"

"Could I help it?" was his loving answer as he clasped her in his arms and poured forth new vows of love and devotion.

The sound of the old familiar cry that she had been wont to address to the picture beneath which they stood caused for a moment the memory of her forlorn childhood to sweep like a cold blast over

her soul; but it was quickly succeeded by such a rush of gladness as made the present and the future, by contrast, seem almost overpoweringly bright—

> Some moments may
> With bliss repay
> Unnumbered hours of pain.

And from that moment the very memory of her past troubles grew dim in the eyes of little Joan.

CHAPTER VI.

Godfrey's Twenty-sixth Birthday.

ONCE again is Seaforth alive with rejoicings; once again made bright for feasting and hospitality.

A year has passed away, and it is Godfrey's twenty-sixth birthday.

All our friends are congregated to celebrate his coming of age. Colin is there, now openly affianced to Olive; and Andrew is there, a mere shadow on the flitting form of pretty little Venetia; Mr. and Lady Margaret Cartwright, and their sons; Lord and Lady Ainsbro'; Edward Manners; and last, though not least, the little pair—Marion and Bertie.

Lady Ainsbro's eye rests with pride and satisfaction on her eldest son and the lovely girl with whom he is talking; for, in the year which has gone by, he has sought and won the hand of Hester Seaforth, Lord Seaforth's eldest and favourite

niece; and Marion and Bertie are consoled for their previous disappointment by the reflection that Joan will be a "sort-of-kind-of-sister" after all.

It is a joyful day, and will long be remembered by all who took part in it.

Towards evening Lord Seaforth sent for his two stepsons to the library, and, in the faltering, stammering language which was all he had now at his command, he declared his intention of paying off all the burdens on Colin's estate in Scotland, and of giving his niece Olive a dowry of £60,000 on her wedding-day. He further expressed his wish that Colin should stand for his own county at the approaching election, and his hope that he would allow him the satisfaction of paying his election expenses.

Turning to Andrew, he informed him that the present incumbent of Seaforth had been appointed to the head-mastership of one of the great public schools, and that the living was now vacant. He begged Andrew, therefore, to accept it, adding that he would rather have him as Rector of Seaforth than any man in England.

He concluded by a touching allusion to their mother's love for them and her deep interest in their welfare.

The young men wrung his hand in silence. They were too much moved to speak.

Lord Seaforth has learnt at last the hardest and severest lesson which man here below is called upon to learn—submission to the will of God. Godfrey's course had first impressed him with the reality of religion, its beauty, its manliness, and its power. And as he lay on his bed of helplessness, during the long months of convalescence, the conviction had come to him that his nephew's character was his own, ennobled, exalted, and purified by religion.

Godfrey had made a hard life easy by submitting to it, while he had rendered life doubly difficult by rebelling against it.

How religion would have softened and beautified his character, drawn out and made noble all that had been either repressed or, worse still, perverted! Drawn out the good in those who came in contact with him, too; while he, on the contrary, had drawn

out everything that was bad. Medusa-like, he had hardened and turned to stone everyone who had had anything to do with him; and in his wife's case he had, alas! had the fatal power of drawing out and intensifying all the faults of her character.

And in the sorrow of his spirit he had compared himself with Godfrey, and had realised that it was religion which had been the moving spring of all his actions, and that it was this which had constituted the difference in characters by nature alike, and had resulted in one in a life of self-will, and in the other in a life of self-sacrifice.

And he had cried in the loneliness of the night, "Give me this strength! Show me this power! Teach me how to gain this peace!"

Many were the resolutions he had made that everything should be very different if he were spared to begin again; that he would for the future be content to be a mere cypher—as no doubt his physical infirmities would, to a great extent, necessitate—and resign all power into Godfrey's hands; give himself no quarter, but bit by bit atone for every

hard act of his past life, and make everywhere restitution and satisfaction.

He expected to find it hard; but he found it easy. He came armed to the fight, and found no foe to contend with!

For he had by that time realised that the hardest taskmaster a man can have is his own unbending pride and self-will, when he lets them master and overcome him; "that of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage;" and, standing fast now in the "liberty wherewith Christ has made him free," he will be entangled in that yoke no more.

The sun went down that evening on many a happy head, and on three young couples whose lives were shortly to be linked together.

Ere night fell a fourth was added to their number.

"Godfrey," said Andrew Fraser, advancing to his brother-in-law elect, leading Venetia by the hand, "I have come to ask you to heap coals of fire on my head. I was once," he went on, more gravely, looking affectionately at Joan, who was

standing at Godfrey's side, "I was once the indirect means of separating you from *my* sister. I have now come to ask you to give me *yours*."

"He's the villain in the piece, isn't he?" said Venetia, clinging to her brother, and looking pleadingly into his face; but *you* will return good for evil, I know."

"Take her," answered Godfrey, tenderly, putting his little sister's hand into Andrew's, "and may God's blessing rest on you both."

BOOK IX.

CHAPTER I.

A Peep into the Future.

And now let us take a peep into the future, at Lord Seaforth's quiet and happy old age.

He lived long enough to see his grandsons playing on the green lawns of Seaforth, making the old place ring with their young voices from morning till night; and to rejoice in the thought that, under the wise and loving control of such a father and such a mother as theirs, there was no fear that a graceless *vaurien* would ever again darken the pages of the family history.

He lived long enough to see his beloved nephew and son-in-law the brightest ornament in the House of Commons, and to hear, as he sat in the Gallery, trembling with pride and delight, some of those bursts of oratory which soon made his name famous.

It was a familiar sight to all the *habitués* of the House to see the old man, leaning on the arm of

his son-in-law, being settled comfortably in his seat before the debate began; and it was well known that he would remain there for hours, contented and absorbed, till his son-in-law was at leisure to come and take him away again.

With his hands crossed on the top of his stick, and his chin on his hands, he would sit, his eyes intent on the figure in the scene below, his ear strained to catch every word which fell from its lips.

It was his pride and joy to see how, the moment Godfrey rose in his place and the rumour spread that he was on his feet, members came flocking in from all directions and the House was soon filled. It was his to be an exultant witness of the power wherewith Godfrey held all hanging on his words with the most eager attention, while the deepest silence reigned in the House, so that his clear, quiet voice was distinctly heard in every part.

His speeches were as rare as they were beautiful. He was ever ready to make way for others, and to resign the task of speaking to them. He cared little who had the credit of bringing the sub-

ject forward, provided only it were brought forward as it should be.

He considered two qualifications indispensable for speaking: to have his subject at his fingers' ends, and to be deeply and thoroughly interested in it. Except under these conditions he never spoke: never for a useless display of oratory.

Living thus to see the realisation of all his dreams and ambitions, and to receive from those he loved all the affection and devotion for which he had so long vainly craved, Lord Seaforth experienced, in

> Evening's calm light,

all that he had never found in

> The wild freshness of morning.

Then, tended by loving hands, and surrounded by loving faces—he died.

Let us look a stage further ere we close; and see Godfrey a Cabinet Minister and one of the greatest statesmen of the day.

He is known far and wide as an earnest and true-hearted man; one on whose judgment all rely,

and of whose uprightness and right-mindedness there is no question.

Friend and opponent alike value him as much for his singleness of purpose and large-hearted liberality as for his powers of oratory and all his many gifts.

He is ever ready to make himself acquainted with all shades of political opinion, and to give each its just weight and consideration.

Such is our hero in his public life. Let us follow him now into his private life, into his own happy home, into the old picture-gallery, where "Godfrey, Earl of Seaforth," looks down upon his living Godfreys and Harolds, and Joans and Bridgets, romping and playing hand-in-hand.

The old place rings now with glad young voices and merry shouts of laughter, where once it rang sadly to the cry of a neglected child.

And dearer to Godfrey's heart than all that group of happy children is that once neglected child.

A feeling akin to envy of his own boys' and girls' happy childhood will come over him some-

times as he sees them at their play, thinking how their young mother's early life was spent.

Again there will arise within him the longing to atone to her for all the sorrows of her life, the desire to keep the wind from blowing on her too roughly, to strew the path of her life with flowers.

Is it only a vague longing, or does he carry it out? We will put our hero to the test. We have heard his vows in the picture-gallery—we will see how those vows have been kept.

For in the wear-and-tear of life there is not the flash, and the fire, and the excitement which in such hours bring words of love and devotion so easily to the lips.

Many a lover's vow has in this world been spoken deep and sincere in its meaning at the time. But wait till the words have been tested, wait till the love has been tried; wait till the cares of life and its troubles, and the wear-and-tear of existence, have worked their canker into the fair bud of life's promise.

Holy, and true, and enduring is the love which comes out strong from the trial.

So we will put our hero to the test.

We will watch him in the daily routine of domestic existence, which is, after all, the arena where lovers' vows are tried and tested, where self is met and vanquished, where noble deeds are done. What do we see?

The eye that ever on her fondly lingers, the heart with which the thought of her is ever full, the tender and thoughtful consideration which reads her wishes almost before she knows them herself, and, anticipating thus her every thought, strives to give her all of which he thinks she is desirous, and to keep far from her all that he deems may give her pain.

While it is his will that every joy shall with her be divided, he would take the cares of life on his own strong shoulders and let her go free.

Yes, he can stand the test. Not lightly those words were spoken; nobly have those vows been kept. Love is not worthy the name unless there enter into it the element of self-sacrifice; and his is a love with which no thought of self is ever mingled;

a tenderness which, by sharing, softens every sorrow, heightens and increases every joy.

A love which, come what may, and arise what will—as in the happiest domestic existence the cares and trials of life *must* sometimes enter; mistakes, misfortunes, and their attendant worries *will* sometimes come—never suffers the shadow of blame to rest upon her. In his eyes she can do no wrong. Let who may be in fault, never her

No; she is for ever sacred, for ever guarded and sheltered, for ever shielded from anything which could give her pain, or mar for a moment the flood of sunshine with which it is his joy to encompass her, in which it is the aim of his life she should dwell.

Surely such love as this must make amends even for a lonely and a loveless girlhood, even for years of seeming neglect and desertion, even for a childhood branded with the words "Not wanted."

THE END.

PRINTING OFFICE OF THE PUBLISHER.

May 1878.

Tauchnitz Edition.

Latest Volumes:

Two Tales of Married Life: Hard to Bear, by Georgiana M. Craik & A True Man, by M. C. Stirling, 2 vols.

Lapsed, but not Lost, by the Author of "Chronicles of the Schönberg-Cotta Family," 1 vol.

Young Musgrave by Mrs. Oliphant, 2 vols.

Won! by the Author of "Jennie, of 'the Prince's,'" 2 vols.

Far from the Madding Crowd by Thomas Hardy, 2 vols.

By Love and Law by Lizzie Alldridge, 2 vols.

Marmorne, 1 vol.

An Open Verdict by M. E. Braddon, 3 vols.

The Lifted Veil & Brother Jacob by George Eliot, 1 vol.

Miss Misanthrope by Justin McCarthy, 2 vols.

South Africa by Anthony Trollope, 2 vols.

A thousand Miles up the Nile by A. B. Edwards, 2 vols.

Straightforward by Holme Lee, 2 vols.

Is he Popenjoy? by Anthony Trollope, 3 vols.

The Russians of To-day by E. C. Grenville: Murray, 1 vol.

A Legacy by Mrs. Craik, Author of "John Halifax, Gentleman," 2 vols.

A complete Catalogue of the Tauchnitz Edition is attached to this work.

Bernhard Tauchnitz, Leipzig;

And sold by all booksellers.

BSB Bayerische StaatsBibliothek

MDZ Münchener DigitalisierungsZentrum Digitale Bibliothek

Montgomery, Florence

Seaforth

Bd.: 2

Leipzig 1878

P.o.angl. 246 c-6/7
urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb11376915-7